

Katharine Aha

Department of Government
Dartmouth College
112 Silsby Hall
Hanover, NH 03755

Phone: 508-918-0586
Office: 112 Silsby Hall
Email: aha@dartmouth.edu
Website: katharineaha.com

Teaching Philosophy

As an instructor, my goal is to create interactive and challenging classes where students can develop critical thinking skills and become more engaged with and understanding of politics around the world. I seek to create an environment in which students from all backgrounds feel comfortable and encouraged to contribute to the class discussion and to develop their intellectual capabilities. Through the course of the semester, students in my classes develop the tools to create their own logically-consistent arguments, and hone their written and verbal analytical skills. Keeping these goals in mind, my teaching philosophy is comprised of three key points: developing critical analytical skills, fostering an understanding of approaches to social science, and creating an environment in which all students can develop written and verbal communication skills. I have experience employing this philosophy in a variety of comparative politics classes at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels, and am prepared to teach additional courses in international relations and research methods.

In my classes, I use a variety of active learning techniques to encourage students to develop critical analytical skills. Course materials are drawn from a variety of sources, including news articles, opinion pieces, and primary documents. Students are able to analyze the various readings and connect them to lecture or other course materials through small and large group discussions and reaction papers. I also develop projects to encourage student ownership of their work and to get students excited about analysis. For example, in my Introduction to Comparative Politics course, students create and maintain a WordPress blog throughout the semester in which they analyze components of the political system of a “partly free” country of their choice. Each week, students are able to build on their work, and by the end of the semester they are the class “expert” of the case, sharing their findings with their fellow classmates. In addition, this project allows for students to develop comparative skills; at the end of the semester, students work in groups to compare and contrast political systems of countries within the same region. I have collaborated with digital learning teams at the institutions where I have taught to develop this project. I use these types of activities to ensure that every student is involved and invested in their project as they develop their own arguments through independent research.

In addition, I teach students basic social science concepts and the language used by political scientists. Learning about measurement and causal inference helps students to analyze political outcomes in a new way, beyond their own anecdotal evidence. For example, in Introduction to Comparative Politics, each week we discuss different ways to measure the concept that we are studying and how different measurements provide varying ways of looking at and interpreting the concept, emphasizing the importance of careful conceptualization and measurement. In addition, I expose students to relevant and current studies from the

academic literature. We work together in class to identify the theories and hypotheses, and discuss the method used to test these hypotheses. I teach students techniques for reading academic articles to help make difficult material more accessible. This approach allows undergraduates to be exposed to scholarly work in a comfortable and collaborative setting, and contributes to their understanding of the field of political science.

Finally, the development of strong communication skills is emphasized throughout the semester. The ability to articulate an argument, both oral and written, is a skill that students take with them after they leave the class, and into their lives after college. I encourage students to ask questions, and work hard to create a classroom environment in which all students feel comfortable to share their thoughts. I work with students who are nervous about speaking in class to develop techniques for class participation. I use both small and large group discussions, finding that students that are generally tentative about full class participation are more confident after talking through argument with a smaller group. Writing skills are honed through both shorter reaction papers and longer writing assignments. For research papers, I have students turn in several components prior for turning in the completed paper. I provide feedback on their topics, introductions, and outlines to ensure that they are conducting critical analysis and that they are structuring their paper in an organized and effective way. This approach helps students produce stronger research papers, and they can apply the paper writing skills developed in my class in other courses as well.

Teaching Interests

I am interested in teaching courses within the fields of comparative politics and international relations, as well as undergraduate political science research methods. Within comparative politics, I have taught Introduction to Comparative Politics, West European Politics, East-Central European Politics, and Comparative Ethnic Politics. I am also interested in developing additional comparative courses, including Comparative Democratization and Turkish Politics. Within international relations, I am prepared to teach Introduction to International Relations, as well as courses on International Organizations and Conflict.

Overview of Teaching Experience

My teaching experience lies within the fields of comparative politics, international relations, and political theory. In addition to the extensive hands on experience I have received, both as instructor of record and as teaching assistant, I have completed the semester long Teaching in Political Science course at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This course provides an overview of pedagogical approaches and discusses approaches to handling classroom situations.

I have been instructor of record twelve times (six for Politics of East-Central Europe, three for Introduction to Comparative Politics, two for Introduction to European Government, one for Comparative Ethnic politics) at Dartmouth College, Middlebury College and UNC. As the instructor, I have full responsibility for the courses I teach. This includes creating a syllabus, preparing and grading assignments and exams, and developing lectures. In Introduction to Comparative Politics, I cover course material including an introduction

to social science, and concepts and theories related to topics like modern statehood, nationalism, regime types, regime transitions, and political outcomes like varieties of capitalism and state violence. I have taught this class at a large state university, a small liberal arts college, and an ivy league institution, tailoring the syllabus each time to meet the norms and expectations of the institution, and the needs of the students. At UNC, I used a textbook, Dickovick and Eastwood's *Comparative Politics: Integrating Theories, Methods, and Cases*. At Middlebury and Dartmouth, I assigned political science books and articles, as opposed to a textbook. In Politics of East-Central Europe, we discuss the creation of independent states in the region, the politics of the communist era, and the transition to democracy. I also incorporate current events into our discussions, including topics like the refugee crisis and populism. These current events are integrated to provide a comparison to past political outcomes when appropriate. Introduction to European Government begins with a comparison of political systems before turning to an in-depth look at the European Union. By the end of the semester, students are expected to have the ability to understand and discuss how political institutions affect policy outcomes and political representation, and the skills needed to analyze and discuss contemporary issues in European politics. Students also research an EU member state throughout the course, and to wrap-up the semester, I hold a mock meeting of the European Council. Comparative Ethnic Politics is a senior seminar that I developed for Middlebury, and will teach again at Dartmouth. In this class, we delve into the political science literature on a variety of topics related to ethnic politics. The readings cover a variety of cases, time periods, and research methods. In addition to leading discussion and writing weekly response papers, students are conduct their own research on research questions of their choosing. I meet with students periodically throughout the semester to check-in on their progress, and students peer-review each others work, practicing both giving and receiving constructive feedback.

I have also served as a teaching assistant at UNC for Introduction to International Relations (under Thomas Oatley) and for Modern Political Thought (under Stephen Leonard). As a teaching assistant, I had three discussion sections with approximately 20 students each, meeting once a week. For Introduction to International Relations, I was responsible for developing a lesson plan and ensuring that students were connecting with the material and able to apply it to current events. For Modern Political Thought, I facilitated debates that allowed students to connect the theories they were reading with modern political debates. I have found that the skills I honed while teaching these sessions have been helpful for facilitating discussions as instructor of record.

In addition, I also taught English at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey prior to beginning graduate school. At Bilkent, I learned how to teach in a diverse setting, and how to moderate debates in a tense political environment. I gained experience in developing activities to actively engage students and to ensure that they were building on what they had learned throughout the semester.