

# MONICA C. SCHNEIDER

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## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

A liberal arts education should produce students who are strong critical thinkers and capable problem-solvers. Students should graduate with the skills necessary to be productive and engaged citizens. I plan to use faculty roles of teaching, research, and service to support student attainment of these goals.

In every course that I teach, each class reading, assignment, and lecture facilitates students' achievement of both broad and specific demonstrable critical thinking goals. My first goal is for students to become engaged and critical citizens. Through the use of historical and factual knowledge of American politics, participants in my class will critically evaluate the politics of today. My second goal is for students to compare and contrast different theories to explain political and social behavior. My third goal is to have students ask interesting and important theoretical questions and consider the normative implications of those questions. In addition, I want students to have the experience of using a variety of different methods to improve their capability of answering their own valid social science questions.

I have already developed and used assignments to achieve these goals. In particular, in my course *Quantitative Analysis*, each student asked an interesting social scientific question of importance to that student. One of my students, "Mark," was interested in prejudice against specific minority groups and ultimately how prejudice might affect support for policies such as the "Marriage Amendment." Mark hypothesized that Minnesotans, particularly males, would be more prejudiced against male cross-dressers compared to gay or straight men. Armed with information from my lectures and assigned readings, Mark compared and contrasted various methods to test his hypotheses. Mark designed an experiment and subsequently selected and defended the sampling design and measurements for the independent and dependent variables. Thus, by doing their own research with my guidance, Mark and the students in the course had the experience of creating their own theories, testing them through the use of quantitative methods, and developing their own conclusions about the validity of these theories.

I evaluated my students' success as budding social scientists using short written assignments, a research paper, in-class group and individual activities, presentations, and a short examination. Using my feedback on their work, students were able to improve their thinking and final project. In the assessment of this assignment, conducted by gathering student comments and feedback in a survey format, I conclude that students felt more confident in their abilities as social scientists, critical thinkers, and users of quantitative techniques as one way to answer social science questions.

A second sample activity is one I plan on using in an interdisciplinary psychology and political science course on social and political identity. Students will compare and contrast individual- and societal-level explanations and solutions for prejudice and racism. For example, psychologists (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, and Esses) posit a "contact hypothesis" as a way to overcome racism while political science work (e.g., Oliver) examines a similar hypothesis on a macro-level. Students will extend their understanding of these theories by applying them to experiences in their own lives or to current societal examples as well as by analyzing films such as Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*. Students will sharpen their theoretical skills by considering both psychological and political explanations for particular behaviors and behavioral outcomes.

The ability to think beyond one discipline is consistent with the broad goals of a liberal arts education and will prepare students for Capstone Projects or Senior Theses.

A final sample course component that would achieve my teaching goals would be to have students evaluate the relevant theory explaining participation in a democracy. Students will write an opinion piece defending their views on mandatory voter laws, comparing the U.S. to other countries. Next, assigned readings will posit theories of the causes of individual variation in participation and my lectures will clarify important concepts in these readings, particularly how scholars define participation, theorize on the causes of participation, and test their theories. To engage actively in political science theory and practice, students in my course will design, implement, and justify their own plans for increasing voter turnout. Through practical implementation, students will deepen their understanding of the theory. Students will be assessed on their ability to evaluate critically democratic theory and political science research.

As an active scholar who is involved in many different projects, I seek to engage students as assistants in my own research. As an undergraduate, I learned about social science by helping a psychology professor with her research. By assisting her with theory development, literature reviews, experimental design, and analysis, I became a better researcher. As I pursue my research agenda addressing representation with solid theory and methods, I plan to invite undergraduates to participate in all aspects of the research process – from conception to completion - including asking sound questions grounded in theory and extant literature, research methods and design, analysis, and writing.

Over the course of my graduate career, I have actively sought to broaden my repertoire of teaching techniques. I have given numerous guest lectures relating my research to undergraduate students. I have also attended and organized a number of political science-specific teaching seminars on using elections and technology in the classroom, teaching with writing, discussion, film, service learning, and commenting on student writing. Most importantly, I have completed an elective two semester sequence entitled Preparing Future Faculty. In these courses, I evaluated a variety of different teaching techniques and wrote an interdisciplinary syllabus. I lectured for an introductory American Politics course under the supervision of Joseph Peschek, a senior faculty member at Hamline University, an undergraduate-focused institution located in St. Paul, Minnesota. I hope to grow as a teacher by contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning and by continually making political and social science relevant to student learning and life goals. I plan on developing courses that incorporate current events, popular culture, and film.

I look forward to a faculty position where I can contribute to a college community. As an undergraduate student, I actively participated in the Residential College system, which consisted of dormitories where residents built relationships with faculty members around a particular academic theme. In graduate school, I have a record of service to my department, the university, and to the profession. I believe that my experiences in service will be an asset to any institution. Because of these positive learning experiences, I hope to be a professor who is an engaged advisor and scholar, participating in university and community service projects with peers and students in that college community.

Teaching and service are key motivating factors in my desire to become a faculty member. I believe strongly in creating a new generation of critical thinkers, active citizens, and thoughtful social scientists. I am devoted to strengthening undergraduate education by creating a learning community comprised of undergraduates and faculty.