

Teaching Philosophy of Amy Semet

I have experienced the joy of teaching at Dartmouth College, Harvard Law School and Columbia University. Last year at Dartmouth, I taught classes on quantitative political analysis and American politics. At Harvard, I was a member of the Board of Student Advisors and for two years I led two sections of the weekly Legal Reasoning and Argument course. I also served as a teaching assistant at Columbia for six terms, three terms of which I led weekly discussion sections to mostly freshman for the Introduction to American Politics course.

Effective teachers impart both information as well as a wider set of tools that would enable the student to both understand issues and tackle problems. I use three strategies to achieve those ends. First, I encourage students to apply issues we learn in class to real-world problems. For example, in a class on civil liberties in my American Government class, I employ my legal background to come up with real life factual scenarios suggesting possible First or Fourth amendment violations. Students can then debate whether the situation presented comes within the ambit of constitutional protections. Such exercises allow students to see how course material can be directly relevant to their own lives. In the course I taught on quantitative methods, I make note of newspaper articles that employ statistical analysis so that students will be able to see how what they learn in the class applies in the real world.

Second, I use the class material to help students learn skills that are portable across fields. As an example, I take time to individually spend with students to assist them with improving their writing since clear and concise writing is a skill set that the student will use no matter what his or her chosen profession. Because I usually teach students at the start of their college or law experience, most students take some time to adjust to different expectations regarding their writing style. College students, for example, need some time to adjust to the more argumentative style of scholarly writing, while law schools must learn to apply the skill set learned in college to legal writing. To assist students with their writing, I write up detailed comments on their work. I also encourage them to meet one on one with me so that I can better answer their questions and respond to their concerns. I will usually devote a special session to teaching students tips on how to improve their writing. I also require students to submit a first draft of a paper for comment.

Third, I make a special effort to use the diversity of the students' life experiences to enrich the classroom. Students in my classes hail from all over the world, and are of differing racial, ethnic, economic, partisan and educational backgrounds. Hearing differing perspectives on important issues of the day allows the student to better reflect on their own life experiences and to develop appreciation for all points of view. This is a skill set that would serve the student well regardless of their chosen profession. I treat each student as an individual, and I try to respond to their individual needs and direct them to appropriate campus resources as necessary. Many of my students were re-adjusting to school after years of in the workforce, for example. Different learning styles may thus appeal to different subsets of students. As such, I try to employ a diversity of teaching methods, including traditional methods of teaching, multimedia/Internet technology, handouts, small group interactions and debates.

I learned many of these techniques when I attended a voluntary week-long teacher training session at Columbia during Summer 2010. During this training session, the Teaching Center at Columbia taught us techniques on how to respond to student concerns and how to better enrich the classroom

experience. I received a Certificate in Fundamentals of College and University Training Teaching for my participation. Moreover, at Harvard Law, I attended a formal two-day training camp to prepare me for my role as a legal writing instructor; we also had a formal class that met weekly with professors and other legal writing instructors to discuss classroom exercises.

In whatever I teach, I try to impart the enthusiasm I feel for the subject matter. The best teachers, I feel, are ones who love to learn and who want to impart their love of learning to others. I aspire for my students to look forward to my class, and I hope they end the semester with a new appreciation for the subject matter and an enhanced skill set that would serve them well no matter what their chosen profession.