**Nicholas Higgins**

University of North Texas

**Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

I was drawn to the teaching profession after experiencing the impact of a lively, passionate professor who took the time to mentor me; since then teaching has been a passion of mine. I began my teaching career at a small, private high school, and was able to emulate the practice of interacting both intellectually and personally with students within the confines of a small class.  After three years of teaching secondary school, I desired to pursue my Ph.D. at the University of North Texas, in order to one day teach at the post-secondary level. During my time at UNT, I have had the privilege of working with some remarkably innovative professors, and in classes of all sizes with students from a variety of backgrounds including non-traditional, international, and first generation students. This experience has taught me that teaching styles must be adapted to the students’ particular educational needs. In larger classes, engaging students through the use of technology (interactive clickers, short videos, and power point) and group projects (court simulations, interactive role-play, and team collaboration) has been particularly valuable. In smaller classes, I often prefer the interaction of the Socratic method, and engaging in more conversational learning. I look forward to bringing these insights to my next endeavor and building upon them in an educational atmosphere that fosters innovative teaching.

 My teaching ability particularly shines in the discussion of the philosophic foundations, behavior, and institutions of political science. I believe that it is necessary to educate students not only about mere facts, but to teach them to analyze their own and others’ underlying assumptions of the nature of humanity and justice. I lead my students to understand the concepts of equality, rights, and justice, and we analyze how different understandings of these terms lead to variant political structures and behaviors of citizens in political communities. By challenging my students to use critical thinking skills, they are often able to see different perspectives of arguments, and enabled to more coherently argue their own positions.

Another critical component of teaching is fostering long term mentoring relationships with the students, both to enhance their ability to succeed in class, but also to assist their development of broader career and life goals. I have accomplished this by not only having an open door policy, but by actively seeking to talk to students outside of class. It is not uncommon for me, upon the end of class, to be engaging one or multiple students in conversations that last an hour or more. This personal interest has allowed me to encourage students with academic and career decisions. It is my hope that I will be able to interact with the students in informal locations, providing not only further academic stimulation for them, but also mentoring them towards their broader life goals.

In order to excel in my role, my teaching and interaction with students inside and outside the classroom is informed by four leading ideas:

**Enthusiasm and Clarity:** Perhaps most importantly, I infuse my teaching with enthusiasm that engages and challenges my students. In my teaching evaluations, students frequently comment that I have the ability to explain complex issues in a clear and comprehensible manner and that one of my strengths is to take topics that are potentially “boring” and make them interesting, and even fun or entertaining. My enthusiasm for teaching and for my subject matter is one of the best ways I can encourage students to grow in knowledge themselves.

**Critical Thinking:** The goal of a liberal arts education is to promote critical thinking that is grounded upon an appreciation of the world and the nature of man. One of the most significant ways to engage students is to provide a framework that allows them to interpret events and to analyze the underlying assumptions of commentators, leaders, and citizens in the political world. I offer a broad palette of readings and discuss them thoroughly with the class, leading students to articulate and evaluate personal and scholarly positions. My classes are structured in order to emphasize critical thinking, and I find ways to challenge students to read, analyze, and summarize material and key concepts. This is best accomplished through a guided Socratic discussion of questions and answers. Additionally, in order to encourage each student in my class to learn and engage in critical thinking to their highest potential, I seek to engage students through activities that appeal to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles.

**Inquiry and Application:** Students should learn why political scientists and political actors do what they do and how they fulfill their tasks. To accomplish this, I frequently pose fundamental questions regarding critical assumptions on justice, equality, and the purpose of government, and I strive to facilitate this investigation by looking at historic philosophical arguments and their contemporary applications. As soon as students begin their own inquiry, they need to learn to synthesize their thoughts and express them coherently. I encourage these steps of inquiry and the formation of coherent expression through the use of written assignments.

**Learning as Teaching:** An instructor can only teach to the extent to which he or she is educated. Thus, it is essential for any teacher to remember that he or she is also a learner. A teacher must be open to questions from students, and recognize that students have specific points of knowledge which can inform the instructor and benefit the entire student body. A professor should realize that the process of teaching others can aid in his or her learning; preparatory research for teaching a class can broaden and refresh ones knowledge base, and insightful questions from students can require further research. In these ways the teacher is also a learner. As a teacher and Ph.D. candidate, I have benefited from interacting with other scholars, both on campus and at conferences, which has also provided me with insight into new areas of research, sparking further research and growth.