

Reflective Statement

Peter Lindsay

As cliché as it may sound, I have always considered teaching a noble profession, and thus am honored to be nominated for the 2006 Georgia Regents' Teaching Excellence Award. In an attempt to justify that honor, allow me to do three things: first, to offer a very general statement of where I am in my career; second, to provide a more detailed look at the accomplishments of which I am most proud, and third to share briefly the methods and perspective that define my career as an educator. Please note that I will say little about what I may have achieved in the classroom. On that topic, I will defer to what my students have to say (via their reference letters and course evaluation comments), adding only that I count success in this area as the greatest reward of teaching.

I.

In 1984, I began my career in education as a high school history teacher in the suburbs of Boston. It was there - teaching twenty classes a week, coaching two sports, advising students, supervising extracurricular activities and dealing with parent phone calls and visits - that I first became aware of the tremendous challenges, pressures and responsibilities that fall upon teachers. The next four years were an education on the run. By the time I left to pursue a doctorate in 1988, I had received, through a steady stream of mistakes and a trickle of successes, an invaluable lesson in how and how not to be a teacher.

Many years, graduate school, and a few jobs later, I am now finishing my seventh year at Georgia State. Looking back over those seven years, a number of milestones come to mind, beginning with my affiliation in 1999 with the Women's Studies Institute and the Jean Beer Blumenfeld Center for Ethics. Three years later, I received a joint appointment with the Philosophy Department, a development that formalized the informal intellectual connections I had already made. 2005 brought a number of unexpected but welcome surprises: the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teaching Award, the Distinguished Honors Professor Award, American Political Science Association and Pi Sigma Alpha Citation for Outstanding Teaching in Political Science, and induction into the Phi Beta Delta Honors Society for International Scholars and the Golden Key Honors Society. Finally, just in the past month, I accepted an offer from the GSU Honors Program to become one of their four faculty affiliates, and only yesterday received formal notification of tenure and promotion to Associate Professor (effective in August).

II.

Behind these milestones lie seven years of rewarding and quite challenging work with the widest variety of students imaginable. Prior to my arrival at Georgia State, the Political Science Department did not offer courses in political philosophy. This omission, while extreme, is not necessarily out of character for the discipline, as the study of politics has moved in the past fifty years to an increasingly narrow set of empirical questions regarding how politics works. What it has left behind in the process are the normative

concerns of political philosophy (what is the good life? what is justice? when does equality matter?); concerns without which there is seemingly little reason to study politics in the first place.

I accepted the position knowing that it would be my task to provide whatever theoretical and normative training students in our department were to get. It was a daunting challenge, a fact that was brought home to me when I arrived to find my first two classes with only six and seven students; students who had seemingly found their way there either by accident (“I thought it was political *psychology*”) or – I have long suspected, anyway – by clerical error.

My first task, other than teaching those thirteen bewildered students, was to create a curriculum of ten to fifteen undergraduate and graduate courses, so that at least the catalogue would reflect political philosophy’s presence. Next came the hard part, for I had to teach all of these courses, and as I had tried to offer them in a variety of subjects, that meant in some cases delving into bodies of literature for which my credentials were suspect, to say the least. Even putting together the syllabi was often a challenge. For pedagogical reasons, I avoid the use of textbooks, seeking to use only primary source material. As a result, I have frequently found myself phoning and emailing around the country in search of books and articles that would not only challenge and interest students, but that would do so in a manner that demonstrated the continuing vitality and relevance of political philosophy.

After seven years, I am happy to report that political philosophy is a thriving sub-field of our department’s program. I have, to date, taught thirteen new courses (with two more due next fall), seven at the undergraduate level and six at the graduate level, and in addition have offered numerous independent studies on narrower topics such as the work of Tocqueville or Machiavelli. In spite of the fact that my courses are not required for a B.A., M.A. or Ph.D. in either the Political Science or the Philosophy Departments, they now regularly reach their enrollment limits (55-60 at the undergraduate level and 15 at the graduate). (I have provided a graph of this growth in my supporting documents.) Most importantly, my classrooms have become the site of great debates about the big questions of politics. Out of such debate has come the sort of critical self-reflection that leads many students to rethink, reject and/or reinforce the perspectives they have – sometimes unwittingly – brought with them. My sense is that through this experience many come to a better understanding of their convictions and, as a result, of themselves. My hope – in fact, a key standard by which I measure my own success – is that the desire to continue that process will remain with them long after they leave university.

I mentioned that I would let my students speak to my achievements, but let me speak to theirs. I consider myself – and students seem to agree – a demanding taskmaster. Among other things, I require students to read quite a bit, to write quite a bit (I rely almost exclusively on essay testing), to follow and take notes on sometimes lengthy lectures, and to defend orally their ideas to each other and to me. In evaluating their efforts, I place a high bar before them, and, as a result, have received a deserved reputation as a tough grader. Through it all, however, students continue not just to make me proud, but more importantly to make themselves proud and, in the process, to raise the standards by which they judge themselves.

I should add here that I view teaching as an activity that extends far beyond the classroom. With that in mind, I have, over the past few years, written a number of editorials for the Atlanta Journal Constitution on subjects ranging from the war in Iraq to the Atlanta Braves' tomahawk chop. (I have enclosed one of them.) I have also organized and participated in on-campus political debates (on the 2000 presidential campaign and on the Iraq war) and colloquia (on hate crimes and on democracy), and helped to found – and served as an executive member of – the Faculty Network for Peace, an organization comprised of university faculty from GSU, Georgia Tech, Emory and Agnes Scott committed to raising community awareness about alternatives to the Iraq war. Not only is the audience different with this type of teaching, so too is the method. Here I am a partisan advocate of particular political positions, and I do my best to foist those positions upon others (an activity I assiduously avoid in the classroom). As Martha Nussbaum once remarked, “the role of political philosophy is to trouble conventional wisdom with difficult questions.” In my view, the more wide spread the trouble, the better.

III.

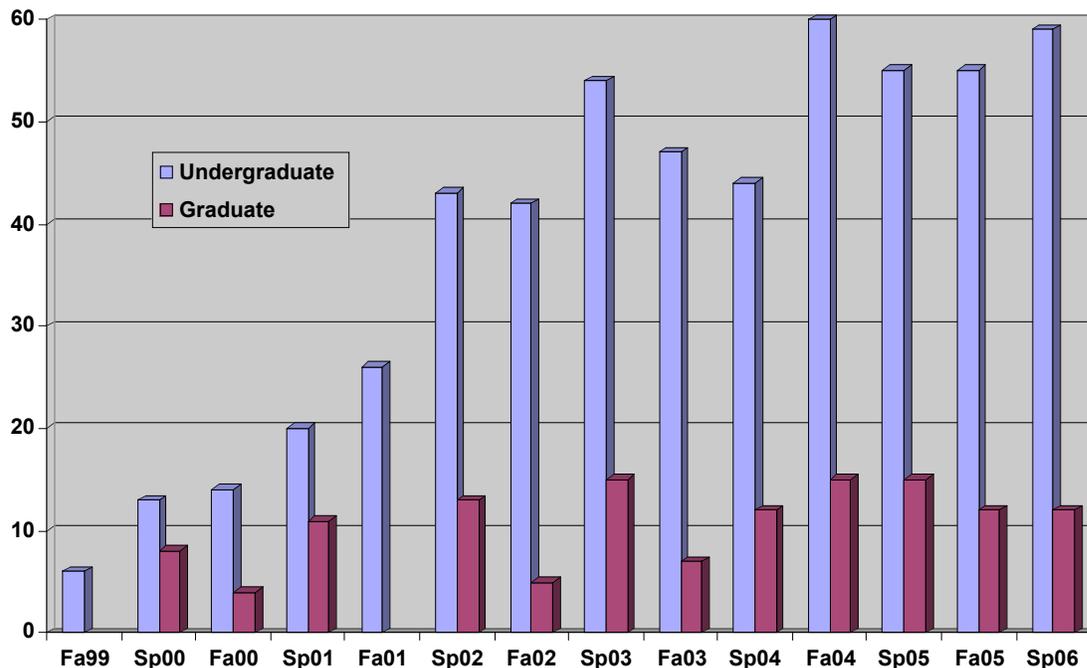
My teaching style has varied considerably throughout my career, as each setting has required different methods and approaches. In my time at GSU, I have experimented a great deal, and in the process have drawn a few conclusions about the sorts of techniques that seem most effective pedagogically. To provide an example: at the undergraduate level I have settled on a testing method that I think is best suited to philosophical inquiry. My principal concern is that testing not be a method for evaluating what students have *already* learned, but rather an integral aspect of the learning process itself. About five days before a test, I give students five to eight essay questions on topics covered in the readings, in my lectures or both. I tell them that two of the questions will appear on the test, and that they will have a class period to answer them. I then instruct them to cheat (sort of) – I tell them that in thinking about these questions, they should talk with each other as much as possible. I encourage meetings in coffee shops, bars, restaurants or any other venues where students might enjoy congregating. Over the next five days, the students, without knowing it, manage to reproduce the very sort of culture (‘salon’ culture) that gave rise to much of our modern philosophic discourse. By the time the test rolls around, students invariably find that the questions which, five days before, had seemed impenetrable are now well within their grasp of answering. It matters little which questions I ask, to me the real work of the test has already been accomplished.

As an additional spur to taking philosophical inquiry outside the classroom, I have in the past few years increasingly employed web-based assignments. (I have included one.) Typically, I will ask students to make a couple of formal web postings during the course; postings that all the students are expected to read. I also tell them that, while they are at the course webpage, they should feel free to post an informal comment about anything they like – a news story, a random political thought, a remark made in class. In this way, the time students are actually engaged in class increases markedly from the posted three hours a week, and the demarcation between school and ‘the real world’ gradually melts away.

I employ a similar strategy with graduate seminars. Here my desire is to start the seminar a day or two before the class actually meets. If, for instance, class is on Wednesday, then on Monday I will post three to four questions designed to elicit a closer reading of the texts. The students will then have until Tuesday to post a 350 word response. All of us then will have 24 hours to read and consider each other's work (I also will occasionally post a response). By the time class actually begins, debates will often have already broken out, at which point class time becomes simply a matter of making sure we cover all that students wish to talk about.

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I became an academic because I wanted a life where I would be continually pushed to think in new ways; where my horizons would always be changing. In obvious ways, my research and writing are directed toward that end. In less obvious but perhaps even more vital ways, my teaching is as well. With every course I create, my desire has been to explore a different area of my discipline, and to do so in a classroom setting where I might be exposed to perspectives I could not comprehend on my own. In many ways, the enthusiasm I have to educate stems from the enthusiasm I have to *be* educated. It is thus no exaggeration to say that a very large part of my intellectual growth has come through the interactions I have had with students. So let me in closing offer to those students long overdue – and heartfelt – thanks.



Average number of political philosophy students per course by semester
(New courses offered in the following semesters – Graduate: Sp00, Fa00, Sp01, Fa02, Sp04, Sp05. Undergraduate: Fa99, Sp00, Fa00, Sp01, Fa01, Sp04, Sp05)

PETER LINDSAY

Assistant Professor of Political Science and Philosophy
Georgia State University

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Political Science (Theory), University of Toronto

M.A., Political Science (Theory), University of Toronto

B.A., Political Science & Italian, University of Colorado

SELECTED ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

Creative Individualism: The Democratic Vision of C. B. Macpherson (The State University of New York Press, 1996).

“Are the Judgments of Conscience Unreasonable?” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* (Forthcoming – with Edward Andrew).

“Exposing the Invisible Hand: The Roots of Laissez-faire’s Hidden Influence.” *Polity* Volume 37, Number 3, July 2005.

“Lincoln on Secession.” *Social Theory and Practice* Volume 29, Number 1, 2003 (with Christopher Wellman).

“The ‘Disembodied Self’ in Contemporary Political Theory.” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* Vol. 28 (2), March, 2002.

“Overcoming False Dichotomies: Mill, Marx and the Welfare State.” *History of Political Thought* Vol. XXI, Issue 4, Winter 2000.

INVITED LECTURES

“The Ethics of Health Care Provision,” Trinity Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, May 22, 2005.

“Just War Theory,” Clayton College and State University, April 19, 2005.

“Exposing the Invisible Hand: The Roots of Laissez-faire’s Hidden Influence,” Simon Fraser University, March 2004.

“The Bush Plan for National Security,” Agnes Scott College, May 1, 2003.

“Jus in Bello” Buckhead Community Seminar Series, March 25, 2002.

“Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*,” Morehouse College, February 26 & 28, 2002.

“Mill e Marx e la teoria dello stato ‘welfare,’” Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia, March, 2001.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

1999-Present	Georgia State University – Assistant Professor
1996-1999	Harvard University – Lecturer on Social Studies
Fall 1998	University of New Hampshire – Visiting Lecturer
1995-96	University of Toronto – Adjunct Professor
1988-95	University of Toronto – Teaching Assistant
1990-92	Harvard University – Teaching Fellow
1984-88	Thayer Academy, Braintree, MA – High School history teacher

COURSES TAUGHT (Georgia State University)

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feminist Political Theory • Classical & Early Modern Political Thought • Modern Political Thought • Liberalism and Its Critics • Contemporary Political Philosophy • The Political Theory of Economic Justice • Introduction to Political Theory • Introduction to Political Science | <p>Independent studies directed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Machiavelli and Kautilya • The Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville • The Political Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli • Just War Theory |
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AWARDS

- American Political Science Association and Pi Sigma Alpha Citation for Outstanding Teaching in Political Science
- 2005 College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teaching Award (Georgia State University)
(See *PS: Political Science & Politics* Volume XXXVIII, Number 4, October 2005, pg. 751)
- 2005 Distinguished Honors Professor Award (Georgia State University)
(See *PS: Political Science & Politics* Volume XXXVIII, Number 4, October 2005, pg. 751)
- Phi Beta Delta Honors Society for International Scholars (inducted 2005)
- Golden Key Honors Society (inducted 2005)
- Derek Bok Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching (Harvard University)
- University of Toronto Open Fellowship

RECENT ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

- Director of Georgia State University Italian exchange program (2001-present)
- Executive Committee, Department of Political Science (2001-2, 2003-4, 2005-6)
- Undergraduate Committee, Department of Political Science (2006-2007)
- Self-Study Committee, Department of Political Science (2006-7)
- Affiliate faculty member and Executive Committee member, Honors Program (2006-2008)
- Executive Committee, College of Arts and Sciences Humanities Initiative (2006-present)
- Affiliate faculty member, Women's Studies Institute (1999-present)
- Member, Jean Blumenfeld Center for Ethics (1999-present)
- Faculty Advisor, Pi Sigma Alpha (Political Science Honors Society) (2000-2002)
- Content Knowledge Committee (2002-2005)
- Member, Professional Education Faculty (2002-2005)
- Board of Governors, Women's Studies Institute (2000-1)
- Library Liaison, Women's Studies Institute (2001-2002)

Webct Assignment
POLS 3540 PHIL 3710
Modern Political Thought
Fall 2005

To complete the requirements for this course, all students must make **2** Webct postings, the directions for which follow below. Postings should be spaced so that one is made between the first and second tests, and the other is made between the second test and the end of the course. The assignment is graded on a pass/fail basis, but you should note that, if at the end of the course you are on the borderline between two letter grades, the quality of your posting (the level of 'pass') will be one of the things I consider in making my decision.

Directions: Pick from among the books listed below. Find a passage in the book and copy it out, citing the page number. Then, in 300 words or less, write about it. Be sure to cover the following points:

1. What does the passage mean?
2. Why is the passage important?
3. What does the passage tell us about the author's political views?
4. In what ways do the ideas in this passage related to political and social life in 2005?
5. In what ways do the ideas in this passage compare and contrast with those of another thinker we've studied? (optional)

Note that the purpose of this assignment is to get you to think out loud about the ideas you are reading. As it is your thoughts that are important, I will not be particularly concerned with things like grammar, punctuation or spelling. The idea here is that as you read these texts, some passages will stick out to you; all you are really doing here is explaining what it was that caught your attention.

Books:

First Posting (Due by October 27)

1. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*
2. Rousseau, *Social Contract*
3. Bentham, *Principles*

Second Posting (Due by December 8)

1. Mill, *On Utilitarianism*
2. Mill, *On Liberty*
3. Marx, (any of the works assigned)

Summary of Recent Responses to the Student Evaluation Questionnaire

Course	Semester & Date	Questions								
		#1 #10	#2 #11	#3 #12	#4 #13	#5 #14	#6 #15	#7 #16	#8 #17	#9
POLS 6510	Spring 05	5.0 5.0	5.0 4.9	5.0 5.0	5.0 5.0	5.0 5.0	5.0 5.0	5.0 5.0	4.9 5.0	5.0
POLS 4510	Spring 05	4.8 4.6	4.8 4.9	4.9 5.0	4.9 4.8	5.0 4.8	4.9 4.7	4.8 4.8	4.8 4.7	4.9
POLS 4510H	Spring 05	5.0 5.0	5.0							
POLS 8560	Fall 04	4.9 4.7	4.6 4.8	5.0 5.0	4.9 5.0	5.0 4.9	4.9 4.9	4.7 5.0	4.7 5.0	5.0
POLS 3530H	Fall 04	5.0 4.6	4.4 5.0	4.8 5.0	5.0 5.0	5.0 5.0	5.0 5.0	5.0 4.8	5.0 5.0	4.5
POLS 3530	Fall 04	4.9 4.5	4.7 5.0	4.8 4.9	4.9 4.9	5.0 4.9	4.9 4.8	4.9 4.8	4.9 4.9	4.9
POLS 4540	Spring 04	4.7 4.6	4.7 4.6	4.7 4.8	4.5 4.8	4.8 4.8	4.8 4.7	4.7 4.8	4.7 4.8	4.6
POLS 8540	Spring 04	4.9 4.6	4.8 4.8	4.7 4.9	4.2 5.0	4.4 4.6	4.9 4.9	4.9 5.0	5.0 4.7	5.0
POLS 3540	Fall 03	4.8 4.3	4.3 4.8	4.8 4.9	4.8 4.8	4.9 4.8	4.7 4.7	4.8 4.9	4.6 4.7	4.8
POLS 8570	Fall 03	4.7 4.3	4.6 4.6	4.6 4.9	4.8 5.0	4.8 4.8	4.9 4.9	4.9 4.8	4.7 5.0	5.0

1. Explained the goals of this course clearly.
2. Explained the grading system clearly.
3. Gave assignments related to the goals of this course.
4. Followed the plan for the course as established in the syllabus.
5. Was well prepared.
6. Spoke in a way that communicated the subject in an understandable manner.
7. Responded constructively and thoughtfully to questions and comments.
8. Used class time effectively.
9. Had designated office and student appointment hours and was available to students during these times.
10. Assigned grades fairly.

11. Returned test results and evaluations of my work in a reasonable period of time.
12. Met the class according to the published Schedule of Classes.
13. Stimulated my thinking and gave me new insights into the subject.
14. Related well to students.
15. Motivated me to learn.
16. Assigned readings (including the text(s)) that contributed to what I learned.
17. Considering both the limitations and possibilities of the subject matter and course, how would you rate the overall teaching effectiveness of this instructor?