

Pon Souvannaseng  
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My teaching in political science and public policy takes as a starting point a strong belief in and respect for the capacity of students to stretch the boundaries of knowledge and deepen critical reasoning through inspired self-directed learning, collaborative engagement, and scaffolded-pedagogic support. I believe learning is a process and an outcome; my objective as an educator is to assist and support students in cultivating their own analytic perspectives and voices as they explore and ‘unpack’ the social world around them. I see my role as one which works to activate student curiosity and reasoning while introducing theoretical and conceptual tools to help students engage and grapple with the intricacy and uncertainty of complex phenomena. In doing so, I aim to help students navigate the challenging processes involved in ‘making sense’ (i.e. synthesis, analysis, and interpretation) of new concepts, data, and history in bridging between the theory and empirics of processes which touch upon their lives and experiences as well as the lives of individuals and communities unfamiliar to them near and far. I aim to build and provide this learning environment through well-designed courses which provide not just content, but empowered learning, community support, excitement and motivation within and beyond the classroom.

I take a ‘community principles’ approach to diversity in the classroom, canvassing classroom values from students in the first session, with an aim towards promoting values of mutual respect, cooperation and peer to peer support and writing these down in a classroom charter. The charter is printed on colourful paper, posted online on the course webpage, and taped on the lecture podium/table/visible spot in the classroom. It encourages students to share speaking ‘space’, incentivizes students to canvas a wide variety of perspectives, and any member of the classroom can point to the charter when community practice is straying off course as a gentle reminder. It fosters organic and dynamic figurative ‘torch passing’ in the classroom and helps students to feel ‘heard’ by their peers. It can be paired in tutorials or seminars with the ‘salad bowl’ approach in which students in the center of the class take turns speaking and have a one in/one out policy where no one gets a second turn until everyone has had a first turn.

I am cognizant, as a first-generation scholar of working class background, that diversity in the classroom can also mirror diversity of experiences outside the classroom. From 2017-2018 I served as Acting Programme Director of the BSc in Politics, Philosophy and Economics programme at UCL. Inequalities in secondary education were unevenly impacting underrepresented students in the programme as some students who had not received adequate training in certain subjects struggled to keep up with coursework in the programme’s quantitative curriculum. Students’ private struggles and financial and family worries became apparent when they were at risk of losing scholarships or failing a course. I raised these issues to colleagues and administration as part of the Departmental Teaching Committee and Chair of the Staff-Student Liaison committee, working to develop better policies for identifying and accommodating students in need of support and raising awareness amongst faculty of the undue impact on student health and well-being of excessively stringent posturing. I provided input to the university’s Widening Access and Participation department in setting up and strengthening its first-year transition mentorship and support programme for incoming freshmen.

I design lecture and seminar materials that not only introduce concepts and theories but ground and contextualize them historically and empirically in an applied and stimulating manner which aims to excite further interest in the topic, and importantly, motivate students to physically attend lectures and seminars as active listeners and participants in a community operating in a space of mutual respect, open communication and innovative learning. As an instructor in the UK to a primarily international and predominantly European student body, I gave lectures on civil society and political communication drawn from academic concepts which derive their origin from the study of American Politics. However, in discussing the rise of political marketing and homophily in the digital era, from the Howard Dean election to the Trump era, I engaged and challenged students to apply these concepts in transatlantic manner and beyond, to their own home country contexts. The class cohort hailed from France and Poland to the Czech Republic and Russia. Each week they refracted and reflected to empirically test how far these concepts ‘stretched’ and ‘travelled’. In this case, it was to assess whether the phenomenon of targeting core extremist supporters over the hypothetical and conventional ‘median voter’ was theoretically relevant to examining the rise of populism in contemporary Europe.

An important component of my lecture and seminar teaching is to prepare and encourage students to be ‘evidence literate’ in their exposure to different kinds of data and methods and their visual representation. My goal is to foster explicit and implicit critical examination of how information is derived, measured and conveyed. My lecture slides are as likely to feature charts and graphs from economic datasets and regressions as they are to feature government statistics in tables, excerpts and quotes from historical and classic texts, as well as maps, images and videos to ethnographically interrogate issues of sourcing, interpretation and representation. I do so to encourage students to engage with forms of evidence they may not prefer or be comfortable or familiar analysing, but to ‘lean into’ their dislikes, insecurities or perceived weaknesses to become proficient and develop a well-rounded analytic toolkit for examining problem-based questions and empirical puzzles.

Students in a consultancy-based course in development management at LSE and in the public policy courses at UCL I taught came from a variety of mixed professional and cultural backgrounds and age-cohorts. Students without economics training have refrained or felt ill equipped to analyse and interpret graphs, while students from math and engineering backgrounds accustomed to formulas and problem sets have felt intimidated or underprepared to write essays or policy reports. I foster cross-pollination, peer-led teaching and support through curated seminar groups which feature a mix of skills and backgrounds. I also design universal formative activities and study materials which students have used off-site in study groups and worked with me individually at office hours and through email to expand their evidentiary analysis toolkits.

I believe in designing course syllabi which feature engaging reading which is up to date with developments in the field and offer different theoretical and methodological approaches to the topic covered. I support diversifying curricula in my syllabi with

specialist and popular sources which anchor academic and policy debates in contemporary empirical phenomena and issues of relevance to promote critical discussion and applied thinking. I bolster critical engagement and communication through a variety of interfaces, such as a class online and discussion platform for students to share additional artefacts and materials relevant to weekly lectures and topics. I also send weekly emails from myself as instructor to stimulate interest, set a positive tone of engagement, and structure learning for the week (either to recap, or to set expectations for the ensuing week); and set out seminar study and reading questions which help and encourage students to form voluntary self-organized discussion groups amongst themselves to continue the peer-based learning and teaching which happen in seminar (sections/tutorials).

I view each class as a collection of unique voices and attempt to understand and assess individual learning needs and provide support in several ways. I learn student names in the first week of term and quietly support their particular interests and assist them in their challenges at regular and specially scheduled office hours. I strongly believe in integrating formative writing assignments into the curriculums I teach; students sign up to write two or three formative response papers in a term before submitting a final paper. I have set up MS Outlook reading groups that allow students to post their writing, receive comments and feedback from me, which is then available to view in real time for all in the course. The papers serve as a repository and archive of student analysis for each topic in the course which others can refer to and engage with in revision as well as a form of assessment for developing practical skills. The response essays are an excellent way to understand student strengths and weaknesses, interests and concerns and to provide feedback and support in building up to longer word count formats and research papers. In my postgraduate teaching, I incorporate a practicum component into the seminar to allow students to discuss and workshop their material in progress. The readings and assignments are an impetus for self-directed learning and synthesis. Discussing work in a classroom practicum or writing a response paper in the same week as a few other peers serves to embed self-directed learning into a community framework and lay the social foundation for peer ties to form in and outside the classroom. As an instructor, my quiet hope is that fostering peer exchange and learning stimulates the development of trust and support networks beyond the classroom.

I bring my experience working in the policy-research nexus into my teaching in international politics and public policy through a variety of media and activities. I encourage the students in my course to distil, synthesize and convey their own learning perspectives in creative manner. To do this, I eschew traditional group presentations which summarize material and divide labour in favour of what I have termed, 'flash discussions' – a weekly 'show and tell' format in the first 1/5 of each seminar which engages with the theme and material from the topic which students sign up for. Students are informed at the start of term that they should operate on the basis that the rest of their seminar peers have already read the material for the week (which they are expected to have done). Thus, rather than summarize or regurgitate material, they are asked to select 1-3 points from the week which resonated with them or which they were curious or inspired by, and to convey or discuss the material in whichever way they choose. The objective is to distil and convey something they thought was analytically important from the week's topic in a way which would be stimulating and memorable for their colleagues. This open-ended format serves to engage students to develop and articulate their perspectives with forethought for the collective, and to do so in a way which may be mnemonically useful to colleagues. The results of this experimental format in the variety of courses and cohorts I have taught have been fantastic. Postgraduate students in the 'Development Management' course have come up with very memorable and informative learning games and quizzes; in the 'States and Society in Asia and Africa' research seminar they presented archival found-footage to convey a historical point related to a concept; in 'International Development and Public Policy' they designed class simulations infused from their own professional and country backgrounds, such as one which involved a background information handout and different rounds of choice-making to convey issues of gender and finance in Pakistan. Students have creatively deployed rhyme and verse, created large class 'thought-trees' and mind-maps, and have selected and critiqued online content using academic concepts. The possibilities have been limitless, engaging and insightful for myself and their peers- most of all, it has been informative, memorable and fun in contributing to class participation, attendance, and long-term recall. It models and puts into practice different types of learning. The open-ended prompt, which is institutionalized into a community learning structure is designed to shift students from investing time in creating powerpoints to emphasizing reflexive learning and challenging students to apply their knowledge and deploy and communicate it in a thoughtful, authentic and engaging way. Students come away having had the opportunity to individually (or in pairs) marshal their creativity and skills, express their views and contribute towards community-based learning.

My approach to teaching provides the groundwork for a strength-based alternative to the deficit model of student understanding. Students bring to the classroom community their own experiences and backgrounds and some level of political thinking which I believe in working with to expand into higher levels of political thinking. Students are inspired and encouraged to master and move beyond the foundational elements of the course and to also form connections between their prior knowledge and new lenses and landscapes. Self-directed learning engages in the co-production of knowledge with their peers and myself. I have been privileged to have had exceptional instructors and mentors who have pushed me to grapple with difficult ideas and histories in a manner in keeping with the ideals of a liberal arts education. In my teaching, I aspire to help my students fashion their own lenses and propel their own journeys informed by academic theories and lived history.

I am interested in teaching introductory and advanced, including graduate-level, courses in international relations, international development, comparative politics, public policy, comparative/international political economy, methods and research design. This would include the following: Southeast Asian Political Economy; East Asian Development; Chinese Political Economy; Development Finance; International Organizations; The Political Economy of Development; Global Political Economy; Race, Environment & Development in the Global South; Development Economics; East Asian / Southeast Asian Politics; Environment & Development; Social Policy in Developing Contexts; Financial Crises and Responses; Revolution! in the Global South; African Development; State Formation in Asia and Africa; South-South Politics; & Authoritarian Politics.

## Teaching Experience

### *University College London*

Programme Director, BSc in Politics, Philosophy, Economics (PPE) degree, 2017-2018

Instructor, Introduction to Political Science  
Undergraduate Core Course, 2017-2018

Instructor, Undergraduate Research Dissertation Workshop  
Undergraduate Course, 2017-2018

Instructor, International Development and Public Policy  
Undergraduate Course, 2016-2017

Instructor, Political Economy of Development  
Master's-level Course, 2016-2017

TA, Public Policy & Economic Analysis  
Master's-level Core Course, 2017-2018

### *School of Oriental and Asian Studies*

Instructor, States and Society in Asia and Africa  
Master's level Course, 2017-2018

TA, Theory and Evidence in Contemporary Development  
Undergraduate Course, 2014-2015

### *University of California, Berkeley*

TA for Introduction to Comparative Politics

### *London School of Economics*

TA for

Development Management  
Political Economy of Advanced Industrial Nations  
Democracy and Democratization  
LSE 100: Breadth Course

## Teaching Interests

Comparative / International Political Economy  
Comparative Politics  
Political Economy of Development  
Chinese / East Asian / Southeast Asian Political Economy  
International Development & Public Policy  
Environmental & Development  
State Formation in Asia and Africa  
Development Finance / Aid Politics / Infrastructure  
Revolutions in the Global South  
The Political Economy of Infrastructure  
African Development  
South-South Politics  
Energy Policy & Environment  
Research Methods (Undergrad / Doctoral / Advanced)

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Teaching Effectiveness Summary

This document summarizes student evaluations I received as an instructor and teaching assistant at University College London (UCL), the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE). Towards the end of each term, students evaluated my teaching effectiveness by responding to a series of questions and providing an overall rating of my teaching on a scale of 1 (very good), 2 (good), 3 (average), 4 (poor), 5 (very poor). Surveys are administrated by central administration and not every student completes the evaluation, so I have reported the number completed to enrolment in the last column.

Along the way, I spent two years in which my teaching was observed and I put together a pedagogic portfolio to earn a UK Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching and became a member of the Higher Education Academy of the UK at the Associate Level in 2012. I was nominated for a LSE Teaching Excellence Award twice, from 2014 – 2015 and 2015 – 2016. At UCL, I revamped the Political Economy of Development Syllabus and received high departmental teaching feedback from students for the course.

Overall Instructor Rating by Course based on Student Evaluations

Year	Institution	Role	Level	Course	Mean	Response
2017 – 2018	University College London	Instructor	UG	Introduction to Political Science	1.8	18 / 42
Spring 2018	University College London	Instructor	UG	Capstone Research Workshop	1.2	7 / 15
Fall 2017	University College London	TA	MA	Public Policy & Econ. Analysis	1.6	24 / 70
2017 - 2018	SOAS	Instructor	MA	States&Society in Asia & Africa	1.8	13 / 21
Fall 2016	University College London	Instructor	MA	Political Economy of Dev't	1.2	17 / 39
Spring 2017	University College London	Instructor	UG	Int't Dev't & Public Policy	1.4	16 / 35
2014 – 2015	SOAS	TA	UG	Theory & Evidence in Contemp, Dev't	1.6	31 / 43
Fall 2016	UC Berkeley in London	TA	UG	Introduction to Comparative Politics	1.2	17 / 26
2014 – 2016	London School of Econ.	TA	MA	Development Management	1.7	34 / 43
2012 & 2014	London School of Econ.	TA	UG	Democracy & Democratization	1.6	28 / 33
2012 - 2013	London School of Econ.	TA	UG	LSE 100: Breadth Course	1.3	19 / 30
Summer 2012	London School of Econ.	TA	UG	Pol. Econ. of Advanced Industrial Nations	1.5	8 / 12

**Unedited Student Feedback:**

Introduction to Political Science, 2017 - 2018

*“I know this perhaps is a little unconventional but I just wanted to thank you for all your help, support and insights throughout this year – particularly with the Formative and Summative essays, and your insightful feedback on my response papers. I feel as though I’ve grown, and hopefully continue to do so increasingly as the course progresses over the coming years. It’s absolutely flown by, and I can only hope for the best when exam results come through. After an uncertain settling-in period, I can look back on a fantastic, hugely enjoyable and very challenging year! All the best, thank you!”*

Political Economy of Development 2016 - 2017

*“Pon was an incredible lecturer. She presented interesting lectures and encouraged highly critical discussion in Seminars. By far the best lecturer I’ve met on this course so far!”*

*“Enjoyed the class a lot!”*

*“Really engaging and intellectually stimulating! Pon is a great person and the class was fun with her.”*

*(one term later)*

*“I am taking a module in ‘Clean Energy and Development’ and had my first seminar today. I felt very confident integrating Political Economy models and frameworks into discussion and wanted to thank you for teaching such an excellent module and equipping us so well for discussion and analysis!”*

*“I just wanted to say thank you for your support and guidance over this year. Political Economy of Development was my favourite module and I have a keen interest in pursuing the topic further. I thought you might like to know I’m going to work for DfID next year, so I’ll be keeping up with development debates and look out for your publications!”*

### International Development and Public Policy

*“I am currently applying for a degree in law and the one thing (only) that really stands out for me from my entire degree is how interested you got me in political science. I wasn’t a political science student and being my first module, I was enthralled and fascinated by the topics we discussed and more importantly for the way you taught it. While writing my personal statement for law now, I find myself gravitating to write about my readings of the Bangladesh garment industry, a topic that will be forever entrenched in my mind and how that kindled my interest in human rights and therefore law. I wanted to let you know that the way you teach really did impact me and made me interested in topics and discussions I knew nothing about and didn’t know I was interested in. Thank you so much for your impact and to let you know that the way you teach is outstanding.”*

### Democracy & Democratization

*“Class is really interesting and teaching is engaging.”*

*“Very good class discussion on more complex material and great structure to the class, very clear. Handouts were helpful and so were going over the readings.”*