

Elliot Mamet
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

On a class field trip, my students and I stood around a new drainage pipe. We were holding class at the Pauli Murray House in Durham, North Carolina—the childhood home of the trailblazing lawyer, activist, and writer. For some eight decades, stormwater had flowed from a nearby cemetery into the Murray family home, flooding the foundation and the yard. During their lifetime, Pauli Murray had corresponded with city officials pleading for help, but to no avail. It took over eight decades—until 2016—for the city to make needed repairs. To stand, as we were, in front of a ditch that flooded the home of a famous Black family for eight decades, next to a once-segregated cemetery, was to viscerally experience a site of politics, power, and injustice.

The field trip to the Pauli Murray House exemplifies my approach to teaching. As an instructor, I aim to expand the walls of the classroom, helping my students see politics as central to our shared social world. I show how politics matters for how we live. Whether teaching classes at the art museum or a local civil rights site, or whether assigning poetry, podcasts, or science fiction alongside traditional texts, I inspire students to be excited about and invested in their learning and our shared classroom conversation. My goal is to empower all my students to find and use their voice, to gain skills in writing, judgment, and critical thinking, and to take joy in learning.

My teaching experience informs my teaching philosophy. I am currently serving as an instructor for The Politics of Public Policy at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, a course covering insights from political science for the policymaking process. I have also served as instructor for a survey course at Duke, The Challenges of Living an Ethical Life. As instructor, I draw on active learning as much as possible in my teaching. I break students into discussion pairs, lead simulations, and design games like ‘Jeopardy,’ where students work with classmates to recall ideas discussed in class. When we discuss a given reading or concept, I appeal to multiple types of learners by drawing on visual references for our discussion and referencing images and videos when possible. I hold high expectations for my students, provide prompt feedback, and hold regular office hours to encourage student achievement and growth.

Crucial to a shared classroom conversation is a commitment to equity. Aware that students come from varying backgrounds, I design my class to be as inclusive as possible, from the physical setup of the room to including historically overlooked female authors and authors of color on my syllabi. I utilize active learning and mix visual, experiential, and auditory approaches to appeal to diverse learning styles. I also promote equity of access, emphasizing campus resources for students, and I outline citation practices and norms of scholarly integrity, given that not all students have the same familiarity with academic writing. Likewise, I work hard to shape our in-class conversation to be probing and intellectually honest, yet also respectful and generous.

Student evaluations depict my approach to equitable and inclusive teaching. Students at Duke commented that “[he] did a really good job of trying to engage everyone in the class and asking us good questions that made us think” and that “[he] consistently ensured that students’ voices would be heard equally in the classroom, encouraging students who had not spoken much to contribute to discussion.” Another student said, “Elliot was extremely respectful and made it clear (both explicitly and implicitly) that all students were welcome in the class.” At Princeton,

students commented that “[he] included all members of the class, encouraged participation through open dialogue, and maintained a welcoming classroom environment” and that “[he] did an excellent job of leaving space for people to speak up while also making sure the conversation went in a productive direction and always remained respectful.” These remarks reflect my commitment to an inclusive classroom where all students can learn and succeed.

I take particular interest in teaching writing, helping students engage in conversation through the written word. With skills I have learned from earning the [Duke Certificate in Teaching Writing in the Disciplines](#), I craft meaningful relevant writing assignments designed to scaffold core skills while also encouraging creativity, risk, and buy-in. My course assignments mix short reflections and longer analytical papers with creative writing options that encourage students to think deeply about a topic that excites them. I use broad rubrics which assess whether papers advanced a compelling argument and whether they handle complexity in a sophisticated manner.

I have also worked to hone skills as a mentor and advisor. Mentoring is important to me because it addresses questions of equity and inclusion while encouraging intellectual risk amongst both mentor and mentee. At Princeton, I serve as a mentor to MPA students with a wide array of policy interests. At Duke, I have advised honors thesis writers, meeting regularly with students as they completed [yearlong independent research projects](#). I have also worked as a graduate fellowship advisor with Duke’s [Office of University Scholars and Fellows](#), advising students applying to Fulbright awards. I have experience in teaching writing, helping students develop compelling research questions, and dividing a large project into smaller pieces.

As a mentor, I endeavor to be accessible, listen carefully, ask questions, and suggest useful resources and scholarship—while encouraging students to develop a sense of curiosity, judgment, and self-confidence. As one student commented, “he [Elliot] worked tirelessly to make sure all students were progressing with their work... He made a genuine effort to have a relationship with each student, which was much appreciated.” Outside of my teaching responsibilities, I have also served as a mentor in the UNC Correctional Education program, supporting my mentee, an incarcerated student, to succeed in his coursework.

I have completed the [Certificate in College Teaching](#) and the Teaching Politics certificate programs, and I completed coursework in graduate school on the Fundamentals of College Teaching, Teaching Diverse Learners and Contentious Issues, and Teaching Politics. Through these programs, I gained experience in syllabus design, lecture planning, managing discussion, crafting writing assignments, providing feedback, and online teaching, both synchronous and asynchronous. I also learned about the importance of making every part of my classroom—from the reading list to the physical infrastructure—welcoming to students of varied backgrounds and identities. I plan to continue to develop my teaching skills by receiving frequent teaching observations and by surveying students both during and after the term for feedback.

Standing around the drainage pipe at the Pauli Murray House and discussing the flooding there as an example of environmental racism served as a visceral reminder of the way political ideas have affected our own local community in Durham as well as our day-to-day lives. My students and I discussed our shared political life, a life rooted in and enriched by conversation with others. As an instructor, I strive above all to cultivate that conversation. Talk is the true stuff of politics.