

Developing teaching expertise in Political Theory at Vanderbilt

*Political Science Department
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The Vanderbilt Department of Political Science is committed to excellence in teaching at all levels. Together with research, we see this as the center of a scholarly vocation and an important part of your preparation for the academic job market. As part of that commitment to its graduate students, the Department aims to give you every opportunity to learn and perfect the craft of teaching. We take your work as TAs and graders to be more than merely helping a professor with his/her courses. It is not “service,” but a vital component of your professional formation. To that end, we in the Political Theory subfield have developed the following plan for developing your teaching expertise. These opportunities are available to all students in the department subject to approval.

1. **Teaching Assistant Mentoring** in Political Theory courses. Your TA experience should be one of learning how to teach in all its dimensions: leading small discussion groups; writing/grading exams and essays; and lecturing. A TA in political theory courses will generally be offered to lecture and be given opportunities to develop his or her skill at leading discussions. Political theory faculty will work closely with you in a mentoring capacity: coming to your discussion groups, reading papers you have graded and attending your lectures.
2. **Faculty-student teaching observations.** Students approach faculty and ask permission to observe one or two classes. Students should observe a variety of teaching formats: lecture, lecture/discussion, seminar. Then, faculty and students meet to debrief, discussing the faculty member’s approach to teaching by design, what worked and what did not work, as well as how the student might develop his or her teaching in light of what he or she learned through observation.
3. **Course variety.** Ideally teaching experience would include courses that a junior faculty member would be expected to teach herself: the Introduction, at least one course in the historical sequence (ancient, modern, 20th century, American Political Thought), and contemporary themes and debates. Students (whether first or second field theorists) who would like to be able to apply for jobs that require teaching the “basic introduction” to political theory (and to political science), should have the experience of being a teaching assistant in PSCI 103.
4. **Summer session.** All Political Theory students should teach 103 in the summer sessions after they have defended their dissertations.
5. **Teaching Portfolio.** A student should be developing a Teaching Portfolio over her or his career as a graduate student. The portfolio documents your abilities and thoughtfulness as a teacher, in order to document your readiness to teach. We encourage you to distribute

paper evaluations in your sections even though there are also supposed to be online evaluations done 1) because sometimes the online evaluations don't happen and 2) because the response rates and volume of comments have fallen since we went to online evaluations. Your portfolio could also include a video of your teaching. A faculty member will review your portfolio with you.