

## **Alec Crisman - Teaching Statement:**

I build my teaching philosophy around the core belief that students are intelligent, intellectually receptive observers of politics and of the political elements of their lives. While teaching obviously involves guiding students through new ideas, my job as an instructor is about showing students the ways in which these (sometimes ancient) arguments manifest in their daily lives, in the debates and arguments and appeals and crises they witness in the news and in the world around them. Students, at ground, have ideas about something like the social contract, or something like the duty to obey, or something like public justification, but they have, most often, not been given the opportunity to think through their political beliefs and moral commitments in detail. My classroom is a space for them to examine these elements of themselves in an open, intellectually rigorous, and discursively diverse environment. My goal is to cultivate the kind of educational space in which they can actually reckon with the consequences of the views they already hold, and choose whether and which new views to adopt. Moreover, by highlighting the immediacy of the theory canon, I can bring them to a greater understanding of the society they live in, the background ideas informing politics and political argumentation, and equip them to be more effective citizens, political consumers, and (should they wish to be) political agents.

I have been the primary instructor for Introduction to Political Theory at McGill University, and have been a teaching assistant and discussion section leader for several other iterations under Professors Jacob Levy and Victor Muñoz-Fraticelli. I've made use of a lecture-driven style with a significant focus on in-class engagement from students, regularly inviting them to analyze and critique the ideas and thinkers I'm presenting. The lectures are grouped according to broad themes in political theory literature, such as whether and to what extent we have a duty to obey the state, what are the duties of the rulers to the ruled, and the normative benefits and downsides of bureaucratic modernity. I have also led students through analysis of the major party ideologies (conservatism, liberalism, and socialism) with the goal of arming them to discuss and critically analyze current political disputes, understanding the normative and moral content that undergirds common policy discussion and disagreements. Additionally, I take pains to ensure that my lectures connect both backward and forward across the entire class, offering frequent reiteration of key theoretical points and frequent foreshadowing of upcoming thinkers and arguments for the sake of maximizing content retention.

For evaluations, I have formulated and graded short-form argumentative training exercises, longer-form essays, and exam content featuring both short-answer and extemporaneous argumentative writing. While my exams have been aimed at ensuring content retention across the full breadth of the syllabus, my writing assignments are always geared towards teaching students to write the precise kind of articles I write for publication in political theory journals. I explicitly train them in the use of counterarguments to expand their knowledge of the debates they're entering and to sharpen the arguments they present, as well as in the art of overcoming counterarguments and prosecuting their original thesis. I grade my students to a high standard, and have consistently seen students, even students with no prior theoretical experience, rise to meet that standard, in part because of the detailed feedback and extensive one-on-one engagement I make it a point to offer.

Importantly, given our current situation in the writing-driven humanities, I also purposefully educate my students on ethical AI usage, and how and when that usage shifts into unethical activity or academic fraud, teaching them how to use AI to facilitate their research and argumentative ideation without allowing the AI to do any of their work for them. As a result of this, I believe, I have seen a significant decrease in the amount of unethical AI usage relative to other instructors who either do not discuss AI at all or who have a policy of an outright ban at any point of the creative process. While understandable, these approaches are not suited to current humanities classes, let alone the classes we will be teaching as these technologies continue to progress.

I am prepared to teach courses such as Introduction to Political Theory, Liberal Political Thought, Early Modern Political Thought, a classic 'Liberalism and its Critics' course, as well as Introduction to Comparative Politics and Introduction to Latin American Politics courses. In all other areas I am an extremely quick study.