

Richard W. Goldin, Ph.D.

Department of Political Science; California State University, Long Beach

Philosophy of Teaching

My courses utilize a diverse canon of theory texts to examine the different perspectives which give meaning to contemporary social and political moments. In discussions, the effects of different interpretations are analyzed through the students' own experiences. My courses do not culminate with a singular resolution to the questions introduced; instead I offer ways of engaging course materials which compel students to consider the bases of their own viewpoints.

On the first day of classes, I say to my students, "this course is not about the texts; it's about you, how you perceive the complexities of politics, and how you choose between different personal, social and political perspectives." I explain to the students that the problematics of "choice" raise a number of important social and political questions. Do the fundamental values we use to guide our lives exist outside of human invention or are the meanings we invest in them contestable social constructions? If we are constructed to believe in the absolute truth of certain interpretations, does "reason" give us the tools to move outside of that which appears "natural"? In my teaching, I utilize stories, contemporary political issues and personal experiences not only to present students with alternative perspectives on these questions but to also problematize the ability to objectively "choose" between them.

I always tell students that in political theory there are no simple answers to be memorized; rather, what is required is that they be thoughtful and engaged. I have no political agenda in my classes and I do not direct my students to any particular interpretation or outcome. My courses are intended to provide students with useful tools to analyze the effects of different perspectives as well as their own.

I believe that students should never simply accept that which is handed to them as an "obvious truth" whether it be in an academic, social or political context. Taking courses in political theory should prepare students for the challenge of a life committed to thinking about and questioning the world around them.