

Teaching Effectiveness

At the University of Pennsylvania, I have served as a teaching assistant in three classes over four semesters: Introduction to International Relations (Fall 2017, Fall 2018), International Security (Spring 2018), and American Foreign Policy (Spring 2019).

My responsibilities as TA varied in each course, but in general, I was responsible for leading three discussion sections of 15–17 students for one hour each per week, grading and providing feedback on all course assignments, holding office hours to meet with students, and coordinating with the professor and other TAs on the direction of the course. In Fall 2018 I served as head TA for Introduction to International Relations. In this role I organized a weekly meeting and guided lesson plans for four other TAs in one of our department’s largest undergraduate classes.

My effectiveness and growth as a TA are clear in the overall numeric ratings (described below) as well as the written comments provided by students. Each student was invited to provide feedback on my performance as a TA, in addition to evaluating the overall course and the instructor, at the end of each semester. Introduction to International Relations was a large lecture class in which students from a range of backgrounds and levels of exposure to political science (i.e., undeclared first-years to fourth-year majors) were enrolled. International Security and American Foreign Policy were more advanced, mid-sized classes with more challenging course requirements. My evaluations from all of these courses were very strong, and student comments reflect that they found my discussion sections to be engaging and useful for understanding course material.

Course Evaluations

	Introduction to International Relations (Fall 2017)	International Security (Spring 2018)	Introduction to International Relations (Fall 2018)	American Foreign Policy (Spring 2019)
Overall quality of the TA.	3.19	3.69	3.52	3.43
The TA communicated effectively.	3.32	3.75	3.57	3.42
The TA effectively stimulated my interest.	3.26	3.64	3.47	3.21
The TA was appropriately accessible outside of class time.	3.44	3.58	3.54	3.42
The TA helped me to learn in this course.	3.42	3.66	3.68	3.29
This recitation section was well integrated with and enhanced my understanding of the lecture material.	3.39	3.71	3.71	3.32

Note: All cells depict average ratings in response to the statement in the left column. Ratings range from 0 to 4, with 4 being the best.

Introduction to International Relations – Fall 2017

- **Instructor:** Alex Weisiger
- **# of students I instructed as TA:** 45
- **Course Description:** This course is an introduction to the major theories and issues in international politics. The goals of the course are to give students a broad familiarity with the field of international relations, and to help them develop the analytical skills necessary to think critically about international politics. The course is divided into four parts: 1) Concepts and Theories of International Relations; 2) War and Security; 3) The Global Economy; and 4) Emerging Issues in International Relations.
- **Student Reviews:**¹
 - “The best TA i have had at penn thus far.”
 - “Really helped me understand the coursework.”
 - “Best TA I’ve had at Penn so far.”
 - “The TA did a great job of communicated information and making it easier to understand and connect ideas. I thought he demonstrated clear mastery of the material, and presented the information through a variety of means so that we could see visuals, interact, and talk in groups to thoroughly examine and understand the information, which was very helpful.
 - “Chris was a wonderful TA who made himself available to help his students. Through recitations, I was able to reinforce what was learned in class and learn additional information from Chris and my peers. The students could see the passion that Chris had for international relations and it made the recitation more enjoyable.”
 - “Chris was a really good TA in the sense that he had a very strong grasp of the material and was communicative outside of class to help.”
 - “Chris was fantastic. He was very keen on making sure to allow us to participate and ask questions. I appreciate how he would ask us what we were struggling with, and make sure to spend time on those concepts in recitation.”
 - “The prompt email replies and class discussions/activities helped me understand the course content better.”
 - “Chris was a great TA!”
 - “Chris was always able to answer questions and I think the way that he made us break out into groups and talk about theories and then reconvene and summarize them really helped me get more perspective on the topics that we discussed.”
 - “Great recitations, I think the discussions are an effective way to learn. I look forward to having Chris again as a TA in International Security.”

¹Reviews are excerpted as is from students’ evaluations, and any typographical errors are their own.

International Security – Spring 2018

- **Instructor:** Avery Goldstein
- **# of students I instructed as TA:** 44
- **Course Description:** This lecture course introduces students to the subfield of international security or strategic studies. In order to grasp the usefulness of the theoretical ideas presented in readings and lectures, abstract concepts are linked with a study of the national security policies states have adopted in the decades following World War II. Topics include current debates about nuclear proliferation, terrorism, the Iraq war, Europe’s changing international role, the rise of China, Asian “flashpoints” (Korea, the Taiwan Strait), and US security policy for the 21st century—considering some of the main strategic alternatives to the US as well as their implications for the types of forces deployed (the impact of the “revolution in military affairs,” the future of missile defense, and the economic burden to be shouldered).
- **Student Reviews:**²
 - “Chris is really engaging in recitation and also very systematically goes through the topics covered in lecture. He is always able to identify and address the topics/areas where students in the class are struggling. I really enjoyed his teaching methods especially where we would do group debates, small group discussions etc. The recitation was very well integrated with the lecture material and also went through ideas/concepts in the readings that Prof Goldstein did not have time to address in lecture.”
 - “Chris was the perfect TA. The man deserves an award!”
 - “This was a great recitation. Engaging, informative, and related well to the course.”
 - “Chris was a great TA with a strong understanding of the principles of security. He was able to clarify important nuances within the theory and also stimulated us to address contemporary policy issues through the lens of the course material.”
 - “Chris had all of the understanding of the very best professors, with a little extra approachability.”
 - “I really enjoyed the course, and Chris was a very helpful TA. He was always quick to respond to my emails and always made himself available to talk for office hours.”
 - “Chris was a great TA. He is very knowledgeable and accessible and helped me learn a lot about international security.”
 - “Chris was honestly a wonderful TA. He clearly explained the different concepts, answered all our question with great knowledge, and also made his recitations fun, yet captivating.”
 - “Chris is a really good TA. He is really funny at times, and does his best to try and integrate everyone in the class. He is incredibly knowledgeable and prepared with interesting things every recitation, not only resorting to one method of teaching, but varying his style. Thanks Chris!”

²Reviews are excerpted as is from students’ evaluations, and any typographical errors are their own.

International Security – Fall 2018

- **Instructor:** Edward Mansfield
- **# of students I instructed as TA:** 36
- **Course Description:** This course is an introduction to the major theories and issues in international politics. The goals of the course are to give students a broad familiarity with the field of international relations, and to help them develop the analytical skills necessary to think critically about international politics. The course is divided into four parts: 1) Concepts and Theories of International Relations; 2) War and Security; 3) The Global Economy; and 4) Emerging Issues in International Relations.
- **Student Reviews:**³
 - “Chris was one of the best TAs I’ve had at Penn. He would always answer any questions I had when I came to office hours and knew how to explain terms and concepts in ways that everyone could understand. He was definitely very knowledgeable about the material.”
 - “Chris is a gifted summarizer, and an unusually knowledgeable TA. His appeal is his distinctive blend in character of brute, sweeping knowledge of the subject with attentive, mild mannered compassion toward the students. I would recommend him to any students that I know to be taking this course he often made me think more than the lecturer.”
 - “I think that the structure of the recitations with the powerpoint, group discussions, as well as discussions regarding the readings was very effective. It helped integrate and solidify the different topics we had talked about in lecture in three different ways. By doing so, I think it only helped further explain everything and the TA did a good job at facilitating this.”
 - “Chris was the best TA i’ve had at Penn. Extremely knowledgeable and helpful.”
 - “Chris did a great job in going over and breaking down key concepts/thinkers in a way that was easily understandable. Chris also has a mind for detail and would always back up his points with relevant historic examples and/or current events. We were often impressed at how much factoids Chris knew and how he integrated it to the concepts of the course. The recitations not only helped me understand lecture material better, it also greatly stimulated my interest in IR.”
 - “Chris was a great TA. He did a great job of really reinforcing and clarifying the important things from lecture and the readings. He was accessible outside and helped me excel in the course; not just with the subject matter but also with test taking strategies. He was relatable and knowledgable.”
 - “Christopher was a fantastic TA this semester. He was helpful both in and out of class and was clearly very knowledgeable. I only have good things to say about him.”
 - “Christopher helped to clear up the information presented in class and helped to communicate and frame the most important information.”

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American Foreign Policy – Spring 2019

- **Instructor:** Dominic Tierney
- **# of students I instructed as TA:** 47
- **Course Description:** This course analyzes the formation and conduct of foreign policy in the United State. The course combines three elements: a study of the history of American foreign relations; an analysis of the causes of American foreign policy such as the international system, public opinion, and the media; and a discussion of the major policy issues in contemporary U.S. foreign policy, including terrorism, civil wars, and economic policy.
- **Student Reviews:**⁴
 - “Great course. Professor and TA were great.”
 - “he did an amazing job. Super knowledgeable and approachable.”
 - “Very good TA.”
 - “Very productive recitations.”
 - “Chris was a great TA. With this being my first political science course, I personally had a lot of uncertainty in terms of the course material, and Chris very effectively answered questions and communicated the material.”
 - “Recitation really helped clarify the historical context and nuances of the political theories. The TA was likable and knowledgeable.”
 - “Chris is a great TA. He makes the course material easy to understand and digestible, and he often brings in outside facts and information during recitation sections that contextualize things, or are just plain interesting. Because the recitation section takes place in between the two lectures, the recitations unfortunately only really covered the material taught in the class before, not after, each weekly session. However, the overall teaching style was great.”
 - “Christopher Blair was an amazing TA and did a great job of clarifying and building upon a lot of the lecture material. He stimulated good discussion and collaboration and overall made the overall course more understandable and manageable.”
 - “Chris is a great TA and made an active effort to keep everyone engaged and informed on the material. His existing knowledge and research areas proved his qualifications for the course and contributed well to the recitation being a positive experience.”

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