

Steve Monroe's Teaching Statement August 2024

Since joining Yale-NUS College in August 2020, I have taught four undergraduate seminars: Methods in the Social Sciences, International Development, Southwest Asia and North Africa Politics and Societies, and Small States in Peace and War. I have supervised nine undergraduate honors theses, led my major's honor thesis seminar, and tutored a master's student in International Political Economy.

Inclusion and Interaction

Three principles underpin my pedagogical success and philosophy. The first is to foster learning through inclusion and interaction. Access to course material and agency over course instruction are pillars of inclusive learning. Students are more likely to grasp and critically assess course material when they can relate to it and teach it to others. The syllabus is the bedrock of an inclusive classroom. I assign diverse voices, methods and media to render the material accessible to as broad an audience as possible. This means incorporating scholarship from under-represented voices in academia, but also rappelling down the ivory tower and assigning novels, movies and non-academic articles. Diverse readings push students to consider alternative perspectives. This promotes constructive seminar discussions that invite and interrogate diverse opinions.

I also give students agency over their learning by pairing lectures with group activities like student-led presentations, debates and town hall meetings where students represent different stakeholders. These activities help students share their perspectives on the day's lecture. They also lower barriers to participation by structuring student engagement within a group setting. This promotes a more inclusive learning environment.

Outside of the classroom, I require every student to attend at least one office hours session in the first half of the semester. These sessions are an opportunity for me to get to know my students, to see how the course is going, and course-correct if need be. For example, in International Development last year I learned during office hours that quite a few of my students were struggling with the course's more quantitative readings. Based on this feedback, and to make future readings more accessible, I organized group-based "methods breaks" in lecture where we went over how to interpret an assigned reading's regression table: a hands-on and inclusive approach to helping students understand quantitative research.

Welcome Feedback

This connects to my second teaching principle: welcome feedback. Teaching is a dialogue between teacher and student. I routinely solicit student feedback through mid-term course evaluations and office hours. Every year I invite a senior colleague to observe one of my lectures. Peer observations catch pedagogical blind spots that are hard to find in course evaluations. Debriefs over coffee afterwards provided troves of teaching advice.

For example, when I first started teaching, I noticed that seminar discussions often felt like ping pong matches between me and the students; seldom conversations *among* students. After brainstorming with a peer observer, I tried a new approach: I take two breaths before interjecting into a lull in seminar discussion. Since then, I have found that those extra seconds give quieter students more time to respond to their classmates' comments, enabling more

dynamic and interactive classroom discussions. Students are more likely to remember and learn from these types of discussions, thus bolstering their understanding of the course material. Indeed, one colleague described my teaching as “highly effective and intentional,” and noted that I am a “strong discussion leader.” In addition to positive peer assessments, I also find student feedback to be helpful in improving how I teach. My student evaluations score higher than my college’s social sciences average, but I am proudest of my students’ comments and insights on how I conduct class. Here’s one example from a student evaluation:

- “Professor Monroe's course was very well-structured and encouraged a lot of discussion between students. There was a good balance between the time spent lecturing and the time spent discussing or working with other students. Overall, this course was very enjoyable and exposed me to a new area of international relations studies that has inspired me to learn more about this field.”

The Power of Preparation and Organization

My last teaching principle is to invest in teaching preparation and organization. Uploading lecture slides before seminar, arriving to class early and grading promptly and responsibly – all these habits enable student learning by facilitating communication and taming distraction. Especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and rise of hybrid learning, I’ve found that getting to lecture early to make sure that Zoom is working, and pairing online students with in-person notetakers before lecture, mitigated the inevitable challenges of distance learning. These practices helped my students and me make the most out of limited class time in both in-person and remote learning environments.

Mentorship, Teaching-Research Synergy and Collaboration

I am an avid mentor. I have hired over a dozen undergraduate Research Assistants and am co-authoring with undergraduates on several articles and projects. As a student, I found this type of mentorship invaluable: it gave me real insight into the research process, the requirements and rigor of prepping materials for publication, and the chance to get my name out there. I am glad to give my students similar opportunities.

Teaching and research can be collaborative processes: as I teach my students, I also learn from them – from their questions, their challenges, their diverse interests and perspectives. Two years ago I taught a new course, *Small States in Peace and War*. Small states and development are the focus of my second book project. This course was an excellent opportunity to deepen my knowledge of small states and to learn from my students, most of whom are from a small state – Singapore. Teaching is a powerful impetus and stimulant to my research.

I apply these teaching principles in research as well. Giving undergraduate Research Assistants agency over research projects, soliciting their feedback and reminding them of the power of preparation and organization has not only strengthened my students’ research, it has also produced better research. Indeed, bouncing ideas with two undergraduate co-authors helped seed the argument for my second book project. My student co-authors went on to win the National University of Singapore’s Outstanding Undergraduate Research prize – winners among the university’s 32,000 undergraduates. This is mentoring in action, and one of my most gratifying accomplishments.