Teaching Statement

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One of my best teaching experiences was as assistant to a course for Quantitative Methods for Political Scientists at New York University. The course consisted of lectures with real-life applications of statistical analysis in economic development and foreign aid, and practical sessions in the computer lab. The course's regular homework assignments culminated in a small research project in which students applied the statistical methods they had learnt earlier. The combination of these four components struck me as an almost ideal setup for methods-focused classes, an assessment confirmed by the glowing student evaluations.

In the last half year, I had the opportunity to teach my own methods course introducing Social Network Analysis at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. I am looking forward to expanding this short workshop into a semester-long course integrating the four components in a similar manner.

I have also served as teaching assistant for Introduction to Political Theory, taught by two professors with very different teaching styles and philosophies. My awareness of such differences has been sharpened by observing them and the varying class dynamics among the 25 students of each section. I had the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this experience during New York University's Teaching and Learning Certificate Program, a competitive year-long lecture and workshop series on how to be an effective teacher.[1] Topics included reflective teaching practices, designing a syllabus, engaging different learning styles, classroom management, methods of assessment, instruction strategies, and the use of new technologies in the classroom. As an accompanying project, I chose to organize a peer teaching partnership group in our department, in which I and two fellow PhD students attended each other's classes and provided feedback. The teaching philosophy that I developed in that process is best summarized by the key words *motivation*, *empowerment* and *constant challenge*.

Motivating students is not difficult when teaching Social Network Analysis (SNA), my primary methodological field of expertise. Granted, this method often requires quite advanced mathematical and statistical concepts. Fortunately, Social Network Analysis also has a variety of interesting applications, including some that are very close to the personal experiences of students, such as the analysis of social media use. With a few clicks in an open-source software program, students can visualize their facebook friendship network on the computer screen, discover unexpected connections and see communities emerging from the data. This can often overcome the fear of the statistics or programming skills needed to master the underlying concepts.

In order to *empower* students, I would start any methodological course with an overview of a few applications relevant to their interests and background. They will then chose one dataset from those applications to use for at least a part of the home work tasks assigned every week. Over the course of the semester, they thus become an expert on their dataset, able to make short presentations when the related data is discussed more in-depth in class. They can also use their expertise in a final research project. Tapping into their specific interest and background knowledge is designed to give them a sense of *empowerment*.

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[1]   A copy of the certificate obtained is available on my website: http://www.fbkeller.net/#!page3/cee5

Well-structured talks and power point slides can often lead students to believe that just because they are able to follow along, they also understand and grasp the material. Especially if no computer lab is available, I would therefore try to *constantly challenge* students by interrupting the lecture with an exercise or question related to the topic just explained, and give them 2-3 minutes to solve or discuss it with a partner. Depending on the technology available in the class room, the intrinsic motivation of the students, and the topic of the lecture, this could even be converted into live online assignments.

I am currently finalizing a co-authored SNA textbook suitable for advanced undergraduates, which I could use when teaching a specialized methodological seminar on Social Network Analysis. But I am also comfortable teaching research design and introductory quantitative methods classes, or a course that mixes introduction to SNA with a substantive topic. I have designed and defended a syllabus on social networks and authoritarian regimes, posted on my webpage together with another syllabus introducing SNA to students of International Relations and Development Studies.

My primary substantive expertise is in Comparative and Chinese Politics, but I am also be very happy to teach other introductory courses, for instance on Elite Studies, Central Asia, or the Middle East, my minor at the University of Bern. As with the methodological classes, I would use a motivating final project to guide students through the lecture and readings, during which they will learn the facts and concepts that help them complete said project. This final project could be, for instance, a mock advisory report to the government on a social problem in a particular country or region. Midterm and final exams will ensure that students do not neglect the remainder of the lecture and the readings.

Finally, I also had the opportunity to act as mentor to individual students and research assistants in countries as different as Kyrgyzstan, China, and the USA, an experience which I value greatly. I therefore embrace any opportunity to collaborate with students from different academic fields and socio-economic background, or advise them in their own research. Unexplored social network data for a variety of fields and topics can be obtained relatively easily from the internet, and are therefore ideally suited for such student projects.