

## Teaching Philosophy by Nejla Asimovic

I began my education at a public school in Bosnia and Herzegovina, before receiving a scholarship to move to central New York and earn my bachelor's degree at a private liberal arts college. I spent a semester studying abroad in Spain, as well as a semester in Washington D.C., before graduating and becoming a PhD candidate at a research university. Learning in many different environments and from many styles, ranging from teachers who taught and tested memorization to those who lightly guided students through free-flowing discussions, I gained an appreciation for the myriad ways people can learn. These different teaching methods and how they affected my own learning process as a student ultimately sparked my interest in teaching and mentoring as a profession. My main goals as a teacher are to cultivate students' communication and critical thinking skills, and – perhaps most importantly – intellectual humility. These important skills are often assumed to be a natural byproduct of taking classes but ensuring that they are developed by students requires conscious and continuous work by teachers. I try to introduce students to multiple perspectives and guide them through the process of questioning and analyzing texts or new ideas with a flexible mindset.

There are three main values that guide my interaction with students inside and outside of the classroom:

1. *Creating a comfortable and engaging learning environment.* In my experience, learning best happens in environments where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves and are motivated to actively participate in classroom activities. I believe deeply in equality and inclusivity and draw from both my own personal experiences and my continuous learning about the experiences of others, to create space in which each student feels valued while showing that they value others.
2. *Clarity of instruction and of learning outcomes.* Setting clear expectations from the very start – what students are expected to have learnt by the end of the course, and what instruction strategies and assessments tasks will be used – is a foundation of a successful class, in my view. When preparing my lectures and presentations, I keep the audience in mind and adjust the material accordingly, which at times includes attempts to find creative analogies to explain complex concepts or devising interactive activities where students can demonstrate their understanding of the topic.
3. *Active listening and adapting as a teacher.* It is often said that teaching is both an art and a science. In my view, good teaching requires active listening to our students – I solicit feedback from students regularly and use it in adjusting the pace and the mode of instruction accordingly. I am also committed to continuously improving my teaching. For example, I completed a teaching course at NYU, entitled “Preparing Future Faculty 2: Achieving Success through Communication”, an interdisciplinary graduate class on the theory and practice of university teaching aimed at helping graduate students develop effective classroom skills and a reflective teaching practice.

Select student comments, related to the three highlighted points above:

- Nejla was very encouraging and provided a place where I felt comfortable to speak and give answers even when I was unsure if I was correct.
  - She also follows up with students in a way that is extremely encouraging.
  - Nejla is quite literally the best TA I have had during my time at NYU so far. She is an encouraging and positive presence, and has made this course one of the most impactful learning experiences of my college career.
  - Nejla is the most effective, helpful, professional, and empathetic TA I have ever had the luck of encountering.
  - She gives fantastic advice from a very intelligent and knowledgeable point of view, and is very realistic with us while also making us feel like she is truly enthusiastic about our projects and excited to see what we can do.
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- Something that was really helpful for me was the practice scenarios that allowed us to actually use the theories we were learning in class to discuss how they would work within the real world of politics. When the theories were a bit abstract to me, these exercises helped to ground them in reality and let me experience the consequences of the theories myself.
  - The group work she put together and the interactive activities were also very helpful to understanding the often dense course material.
  - Honestly, the recitation was perfect for me. It was always engaging, Nejla made herself available for questions and was great at explaining hard concepts, and it was consistently my favorite and most rewarding part of the class.
  - Nejla was really great at making the topics more simple and gave detailed explanations that made the confusing topic easier to understand. The made up scenarios where we got to practice using all the theories we had learned that week was very engaging and helped me understand the material a lot better!
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- She started each section by giving us time to write down sources of confusion we had encountered during the week. The balance between theory and application in recitation was also very useful because it made it easier to recall different methods that could be applied to our research.
  - She actively listens to our feedback on what we would like to learn during the class and adjusts her teaching style to fit the needs of the class.
  - Would take her time to make sure we really understood the material. For example, during the statistics section we went over many examples until we got it.
  - Nejla was always very patient when we didn't understand concepts and always took the time to make sure we could gain a good understanding.