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15 December 2019

Attn:

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**Re:** Teaching Statement / Application for position of Assistant Professor and McMillan Chair in Russian Studies at Carleton University

If I were to summarize my teaching philosophy in a single word, it would be empowerment. Often times, students – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – leave social science with substantive knowledge and skills but little idea of how to apply it *or* confidence in doing so. Such courses are often viewed as stepping stones to other careers – in political science typically law or consulting – but not necessarily a source of useful skills or practical everyday value. In my mind, this is unfortunate. Ideally, coursework should provide knowledge, a broader set of skills for applying it, and crucially *confidence in doing so in the real world*. Two teaching positions I held prior to graduate school crystallized this concept for me: my work as a teaching assistant for a Portuguese language class and in my university's jewelry studio. In both cases, the goal was to teach students with no prior knowledge how to confidently (and in the jewelry studio safely) apply what they learned to real life scenarios – the former in a Freshmen summer semester trip to Brazil and the latter to crafting their own projects. These courses taught me the importance of not only highlighting for students how the skills they learn can be useful for their day-to-day, but giving them the confidence to do so.

I believe that applying this lesson to coursework in the social sciences involves providing students with substantive and methodological tools to make them good consumers and producers of research. They should be able to confidently critique the claims and projects of others, while also being able to devise a strategy for researching and defending their own. Although few will ever need to write formal research papers, the ability to intelligently consume and evaluate other's research, as well as to formulate ways to answer important empirical questions are critical in all fields. As such, I try to integrate the basics of research design into all of my teaching. One of the best examples of a course in which I applied this philosophy was my English-language introductory course in political science (Modern Political Science) at the National Research University – Higher School of Economics (NRU – HSE) in Russia, which I have taught three times. Substantively, the goal was to introduce masters students from diverse programs (Applied Politics; Russian Studies; and Politics, Philosophy, and Economics) to Western political economy. Methodologically, however, I devote several weeks to basic causal inference and best practices for qualitative and quantitative research. I reinforce these lessons with a series of short reviews of contemporary research papers assigned as part of the course reading. By showing students they can make good critiques even of published research, I want to build their confidence in evaluating others' arguments and claims. The culmination of the course is to apply what they learned to a project proposal, which I hope the students will use as their capstone project for the first year of their Masters' program. Taken together, these steps helped students to unify the substantive knowledge they gain with both useful skills and the confidence to deploy them. My efforts after my first year teaching were deemed so successful, that I was invited to teach a capsule course within one of the Masters' programs' research seminars to help students to develop and hone their capstone projects further. In this capsule course was to spend extensive time one-on-one with students in an iterative writing and rewriting process designed to help them identify flaws in their research, arguments, and presentation early and correct them for their first-year capstone defense.

Another example of my commitment to empowering students to be good producers and consumers of research can be seen in my work helping students develop original research. In my three-and-a-half years as a tenure-track faculty member at NRU – HSE, I have supervised 19 total students (16 in English, 3 in Russian) at

the undergraduate, Masters', and doctoral levels from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, including political economy, media studies, philosophy, video game studies, and history. In each case, I spent a great deal of time in one-on-one discussions with students in order to help them identify their research question, craft a research design to address it, carry out the study, and then to write-up their results. Part of the challenge of project supervision for me has been because our Masters' programs takes an pluralistic, interdisciplinary approach to initial selection of students and allows them to write their projects from an equally diverse range of academic perspectives. The projects I have supervised include not only those touching on political economy, but those that have been rooted in philosophy, sociology, history, video game studies, media studies, and law. Supervising such projects has required me to take a very flexible approach to my students' work. In particular, I have spent a great deal of time thinking carefully about how to apply political science perspectives and theories to other disciplines (and vice-versa), as well as how to integrate differing perspectives and approaches into a coherent, interdisciplinary whole. A secondary challenge has been in teaching students with very different traditions and backgrounds from my own. While the vast majority of NRU – HSE students are Russian, I have also supervised students from Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Central Asian Republics. With many students, the language barrier is secondary to different understandings of the purpose of research, how to conduct it, and its ethics. While I would like to claim that I have found universal strategies, my experience is that bridging such differences requires extensive one-on-one interaction. Nonetheless, I found the experience extremely rewarding, particularly as I grew more comfortable working one-on-one with students and developed effective ways to teach students from other disciplines how to incorporate good theory and research design into their work. In addition to my work at HSE, I also spent time working with undergraduate students one-on-one in two of the courses I TA'd as a graduate student at Columbia University: *Data Analysis and Statistics for Political Science Research* and *the Political Economy of Development*. Both courses required students to write shorter, empirical research papers and were valuable for me in learning how to guide lower-level undergraduate students, particularly those from majors fields that with less emphasis on empirical methodologies.

I also think that promoting students' critical thinking skills and ability to produce and evaluate research can also be promoted organically through substantive work. During discussion seminars for my Modern Political Science course, I often used discussion sections as a means of promoting this goal. Although much of our time was spent on discussing the basic arguments in reading assignments, I devoted considerable time to dissecting the theoretical logic of the arguments and the empirical data marshalled to support it. I have found that students are most engaged with material when they are equipped to critique it but that many feel intimidated by unfamiliar empirics (particularly quantitative material). One of the ways in which I tried empower students was to emphasize basic statistical literacy and an appreciation of basics of causal inference. In doing so, I helped students to feel more comfortable pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of both the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies that figured in their reading assignments in ways that were hopefully helpful beyond their courses. I also taught students to think about ways to address flaws, in order to help them learn to engage constructively with other's work and with the work of future colleagues. In all cases, I made sure to emphasize how such skills would be helpful in future careers, whether inside or outside the academy.

Substantively, I would welcome teaching courses at any level on political economy, the politics of the post-communist countries, distributive politics, and/or the welfare state in a comparative perspective: my areas of substantive specialization. Aside from substantive knowledge, my teaching approach emphasizes basic empirical literacy and would be geared towards helping students, particularly undergraduates, understand how to incorporate critiques of data and method into their evaluations of material. In an introductory undergraduate course, for example, I would want to dedicate a week or two to teaching basic research design and causal inference, as well as how to evaluate quantitative and qualitative data. I have found that small research papers (5 pages), as well as periodic written critiques of each week's material are particularly helpful in reinforcing these lessons and helping students to apply them. In more advanced or graduate level courses, I would continue to emphasize written critiques of reading materials, but also assign students more traditional research papers in close consultation with me. In addition to substantive courses, I would also be happy to teach a broader course on research design including causal inference, project design, and best practices in mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) research. Such a course would equip students with skills to define and pursue their own research projects, whether inside or outside the academy. Finally, given my emphasis on methodological literacy, I would also welcome the opportunity to continue to supervise individual student research at both the undergraduate and graduate level.