My teaching at Colgate has concentrated on classes that deal with the Middle East and the Islamic world: Comparative Politics of the Middle East (POSC 215); Islam and Politics (POSC 304); International Relations of the Middle East (POSC 363); and Core-Middle East (Core 183). I also teach a seminar on democratization in the developing world, which compares experiences with democratic transitions in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and East Asia (POSC 437).

During my courses, I aim for students to accomplish four objectives:

- Achieve mastery of the course readings. This entails full understand of each reading’s factual content and argument.
- Improve analytical skills. Students should develop the capacity to evaluate a complex problem, break it into its components, examine the relationship among these components, and then reassemble these components into a new understanding of the problem.
- Increase intellectual confidence. Students should gain a greater willingness and capability to take a position on a difficult issue, explain this position, defend it from criticism, and learn from this criticism.
- Strengthen communication skills. Students should increase their capacity to communicate ideas verbally and in writing.

I pursue these objectives by employing the following techniques, which make up the “tool box” that I draw upon when designing and teaching courses.

1. Reading assignments: I assign a heavy reading load from a variety of sources, including textbooks, primary source readings by key thinkers and policymakers, analytical writings by scholars in several disciplines, and commentary by political observers and pundits. My goal is to give students an awareness of the multiple perspectives on any given issue along several parameters: disciplinary (political science, history, sociology, law); political (the positions of all key actors in a dispute); and professional (scholar, policymaker, journalist, and others). By the end of my course, students have gained extensive experience analyzing a wide variety of types of information, evaluating its accuracy, and weighing its soundness in order to arrive at a position.

2. Lectures by the instructor: I rely on lectures to convey essential information, place the readings in a broader intellectual and policy context, and provide alternative perspectives on the issues discussed in the readings. In most of my classes, I write an outline of the lecture on the board and then derive my presentation from the points in the outline. This approach has several advantages: it enhances the clarity of the presentation, as students can refer to the outline to remind themselves how a given point fits into the overall flow of the lecture; it facilitates studying, as I make these outlines available to students through Blackboard; and it allows me to present the lecture without relying on notes. Instead, I can maintain maximum eye contact with the audience and glance at the outline to remind myself of the next point in the argument, while also moving out from behind the podium to interact more freely with students. This approach has worked well at conveying information clearly in a manner that facilitates class discussion and student questions.
3. Analytical papers and exams: In these assignments, I present a provocative statement or controversial policy and call upon the student to evaluate it. The student’s job is to describe the core issue, present the competing arguments, evaluate the evidence supporting each argument, and reach a conclusion regarding which view he/she considers most convincing. I provide students with detailed comments on their written work, particularly their papers. I try to begin with a positive observation, and then provide specific critiques of strengths and weaknesses in the essay. I also offer specific suggestions for improving each student’s writing technique. For paper assignments, I type my comments on a separate sheet of paper. The comments run approximately one page in length, single spaced. I keep a copy of these comments on my computer and refer to it when evaluating subsequent papers by the same student, in order to assess the student’s progress. I also keep an electronic copy of each student’s paper for this same purpose.

4. Reaction papers: Each student is required to attend at least two events outside of class that are related to the course, such as a campus lecture, a film, or a cultural performance. The student then prepares a short essay that summarizes the key points made at the event; indicates whether he/she agrees or disagrees with these points; and explains his/her position using ideas and evidence from the class readings. This assignment exposes students to new perspectives on the course topic, often from disciplines other than political science. It allows them to explore this new perspective on their own initiative while further developing their writing and critical thinking skills. It also makes them aware of the many opportunities at Colgate for learning outside of the classroom.

5. Research papers: In addition to assigning research papers in my classes, I have worked with several students on their independent research projects. I have advised seven students who wrote honors theses and two students who conducted independent research during the summer. Working with students on their original research has been among the most enjoyable experiences during my time at Colgate. I regard the advising process as a collaborative effort in which the student and I jointly explore an important and interesting question. I often gain valuable insights into my own work during this process. My approach to advising students on their research emphasizes a high degree of interaction to help them pose a clear research question, develop a research strategy, identify relevant sources, conduct research, analyze this information, draw a clear conclusion, investigate (and disprove) alternative explanations, and present the project’s findings in a succinct and persuasive manner.

6. Student presentations on readings: I routinely require students to present the course readings in class. I have two objectives with this assignment: develop the student’s capacity to distill a complex reading down to its three or four key points; and increase the student’s public speaking skill and confidence. I enforce a rigid time constraint of 10 minutes on these presentations, in order to deter students from simply describing the reading at great length. I use the key issues raised in the student’s presentation as the starting points for class discussion. After class, I send the student a detailed e-mail regarding his/her grade on the presentation and a few suggestions for improvement.

7. Analytical presentations by students: In these assignments, I give a student a specific question to address or a provocative statement to evaluate. His/her presentation must have the following characteristics: identify the core issues; present the competing arguments; evaluate the validity of these arguments; and take a position. We then proceed to a class discussion that
examines the student’s position. As with the student presentations on readings, I send the student a detailed e-mail with his/her grade and suggestions for improvement.

8. **Team presentations by students:** This assignment entails giving a group of two or three students full responsibility for 35 minutes of class. I assign the team a topic. They must then conduct research to identify a relevant reading, distribute this reading to the class, present it, and lead discussion. I meet with each team for roughly 30 minutes to review their research strategy, identify relevant sources, and discuss their approach to the class presentation. In addition to strengthening the research and communication skills of students, this assignment requires them to work together in groups. This experience develops interpersonal, teamwork, and collaboration skills. It also creates an opportunity for students to engage in serious intellectual discussions outside of class.

9. **Class discussion:** In both lecture courses and seminars, I rely heavily on student participation in class. I usually distribute several discussion questions before class and assign specific students to prepare a brief response and to take the lead during the class discussion. This approach ensures a high level of participation and gives the students a sense of responsibility for the discussion. I initiate a class discussion by asking a question of the class, soliciting questions from them, presenting a provocative assertion, or showing a brief video clip that defends a controversial position. Throughout each discussion, I make a great effort to create a climate in the classroom that encourages students to challenge ideas from the readings, the instructor, and each other. Our collective goal is to understand the arguments presented and to evaluate these arguments in terms of their factual accuracy and conceptual coherence. Students are expected to articulate a clear position, support it with evidence and argumentation, and respond thoughtfully to questions from the instructor and other students.

I utilize these nine techniques differently in each of my classes. For example, my 100- and 200-level introductory courses (Core Middle East; Comparative Politics of the Middle East) place a relatively heavy emphasis on lectures in order to cover a large amount of basic material quickly – lectures make up roughly 60 percent of each class, while the remainder of class time is spent on discussion and student presentations on the readings. Students also write analytical papers, reaction papers, and exams. In my 300-level courses (International Relations of the Middle East; Islam and Politics), lectures constitute about 30 percent of the course. The balance of class time is spent on student presentations on the readings, analytical presentations by students on questions provided by the instructor, team presentations, and discussion. Written work consists of analytical papers, reaction papers, and a 20-page research paper. My 400-level seminar involves no lecturing. The classroom experience is built around student presentations – both on the readings and on analytical questions posed by either me or the students. These presentations provide the foundation for class discussion. The student who gives the presentation also begins the class discussion, which I then develop. Students in my seminar also write analytical papers, reaction papers, and a 20-page research paper.

Throughout my courses, I am very aware of the distinctive challenges associated with teaching about the Middle East. Many students enter my classes with strongly held opinions about Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict, while others arrive with deeply-rooted assumptions about Islam and the Arab world. These presuppositions could inhibit learning if they lead to acrimonious exchanges that force students to constantly defend a position rather than evaluate it. However, they are also a potential resource for stimulating discussion and sharpening students’ thinking and communication skills. I try to harness the contentious nature of my subject matter
by grounding each class in four principles, which are stated explicitly and reiterated throughout the semester:

- clarity of thought and expression in order to articulate a position accurately;
- analytical rigor in order to evaluate this position fairly and thoroughly;
- intellectual flexibility in order to understand competing views;
- willingness to engage constructively with opposing views in order to refine and develop a position.

This approach encourages students to test their presuppositions in an intellectual environment that is respectful and supportive. It also empowers them to understand the complexity and subtlety of the issues that shape the Middle East, and to develop their own well-informed positions on the region.