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Teaching Statement

The demand for ruthless prioritization in a world of scarce resources transcends time, issues, and actors. Political leaders at every level must weigh their objectives against inevitable tradeoffs. Debates over the appropriate balance between national security and individual freedom, or economic growth and environmental conservation, highlight the inherent tension that resides in many policy decisions. The process of prioritizing is a difficult task that yields invaluable insight on such debates. It encourages deep contemplation, results in a more full appreciation for the complexity of international affairs, and hones a student's analytic skills. The value of prioritizing objectives, however, is rarely acknowledged explicitly much less cultivated during one's academic career, a glaring shortfall I endeavor to address in each of my courses. Drawing attention to the importance of prioritization aids my primary instructional goal: *for students to depart my class more confident, active, open-minded and better informed citizens.*

Exercises involving the practice of prioritizing are exceedingly applicable and relevant to International Relations and American Foreign Policy courses. One example of an exercise I frequently employ is to ask students to rank in order of importance the primary objectives of American foreign policy: physical security, economic prosperity, quality of life, and human rights. I begin such exercises as an individual task to allow each student time to organize and examine their own thoughts. Next, I place the students in small groups and ask each group to reach a consensus. Following the small group discussion, I have a volunteer list each group's order of objectives on the board to allow the class to compare responses. Finally, I open the discussion to the entire class and drive the students to reach a class consensus. By this time students have refined their personal arguments, contemplated the thoughts of their peers, and are generally more confident and eager to discuss their thoughts in an open forum. This exercise sheds new light and adds nuance to a multitude of national security topics such as the authorization to use military force, the employment of drones, and intelligence collection by the National Security Agency.

The art of prioritization is not only a persistent theme in world politics but also a fundamental skill that is essential to developing a students' analytic acumen. Scholars of international relations explain world events in terms of three broad sets of variables—material, institutional, and ideological factors. Each of these variables is present and interrelated in every situation. The challenge I present to students is to select the most significant variable in each case, and develop explanations that are generalizable across a variety of situations. This process prompts students to closely examine key terms and concepts and more thoroughly consider the validity of the claims, evidence, and assumptions used to build an argument. In this way thoughtful prioritization not only improves student's analytic abilities, but also spurs independent research by permitting students to more confidently challenge their own and other's logic and in turn formulate their own distinct theories and hypotheses. By emphasizing the central importance of prioritization I strive to introduce students to the pleasure of taking and defending

a position on an issue, and perhaps most importantly, to the value of remaining open minded and respectful when interacting with those that possess opposing views.