## *Spring 2011 Newsletter*

### 1) Message From the Section Chair

I am very pleased that Shannon Jenkins agreed to serve as Editor of the Political Science Educator and that so many folks submitted manuscripts for the newsletter. This is a great way for us to promote educating our students.

My term as chair ends at the 2011 APSA meeting. I have enjoyed serving. My favorite part of serving as chair is the opportunity to meet political scientists that share a common interest in political science education.

It is my hope that we can continue to grow our community via the Political Science Educator and APSA Connect. Another method we can consider pursuing is hosting events at the various regional political science meetings.

Best regards,
Carlos Huerta, Texas A&M Corpus Christi

### 2) Message From the Newsletter Editor

After much delay, I am pleased to present you with the newly rejuvenated Political Science Educator. Many thanks to all those who submitted manuscripts in response to Carlos's call. I actually received more than I could reasonably publish in one newsletter which means I now have plenty for upcoming editions.

Moving forward, I will be exploring working with APSA in producing the newsletter, and I welcome new submissions. I have been intrigued by the submissions I have received to date, and I look forward to learning more about the exciting things you are all doing in your classroom.

Shannon Jenkins, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

### 3) APSA Teaching and Learning Conference Recap

At an informal section meeting at the February Teaching and Learning Conference, some important section matters were covered that we would like all section members to consider. First, all section members should think about nominating department members for the APSA Teaching Innovation award, or perhaps themselves. It is an important tool for promoting our goals to the larger APSA audience. Second, John Ishiyama, editor-in-chief of our JPSE, suggested that we cite as many articles as possible from the journal to increase the prominence of the journal and thus its inclusion in various journal databases. These citations can have a great cumulative effect in promoting the journal and the scholarship of teaching (SoTL) in general. Third, all members should be aware that they can select the SoTL as a research interest in our APSA profiles!

On conferences: To increase panel numbers at APSA, members suggested that in the future we also look at co-sponsoring panels with subject areas that are interested in teaching practices (ex: EU section). To promote the TLC, which has had a decline in attendance in the past two years for various reasons, we discussed active recruiting from local colleges in the future. We ask all section members to work with local schools when the conference is in your area. In that vein, one community college faculty member suggested possibly having a working group for APSA Seattle for community college profs and then recruiting them into our section. An assessment working group was also suggested. Finally, there was a call for submissions for the newsletter.

Overall, the conference was an exciting opportunity to learn more about different teaching styles and tools. We are all doing some very good and interesting work, but we need to continue to push our agenda at our home institutions and in the profession as a whole. Otherwise, we risk being sidelined again and losing the core focus on the education of our students.

Alison McCartney, Towson University

### 4) APSA Preview: Political Science Education Section

The Political Science Education Division, along with the Teaching and Learning Division, will co-sponsor 6 panels and a poster session at the upcoming APSA conference in Seattle. The papers accepted for presentation reflect a thought-provoking array of approaches to the scholarship of teaching and learning, with some providing detailed case studies of innovative approaches to specific courses and others developing research-informed guidelines for our undergraduate and graduate curriculum. The number of submissions relying on rigorous experimental methods to assess the impact of pedagogical approaches also continues to grow.

As you may know, the APSA formula for determining the number of panel slots includes audience attendance. Please keep this in mind as you decide which panels to attend in Seattle. One way to guarantee a visible presence for teaching concerns at our national conference is to attend our Political Science Education panels. See you in Seattle!

Cherie Strachan, Central Michigan University, PSE Program Chair

## 5) Student Feedback

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After years of teaching multiple sections of a lecture-based introductory American politics course, I gave up the comfort of the "sage-on-the-stage" paradigm and challenged myself to become a facilitator and guide in students' learning process, rather than an "expert" imparting information for students to memorize or learn to perform well on course assessments. This process was not easy. Giving up control in the classroom can be difficult, especially for somebody with a "type A" personality. I worried that I was not an "expert" on all the issues we would debate in my political controversies course. I worried that I could not answer students' questions about key actors and specific policies as they selected their own civic engagement projects in my civic engagement workshop. However, I reminded myself that the goal of both classes was to teach students to find their own answers: to empower students to become lifelong learners and engaged citizens equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to understand and participate actively in contemporary policy debates. Moreover, I felt confident in my ability to lead by example, given my own involvement in policy debates and public affairs.

My courses now require students to actively construct their own knowledge. In the American Political Controversies course, for example, students learn about logical fallacies, diagnosing fallacies in sample passages provided by the instructor and in news stories gathered by other students. They then read, discuss, analyze, debate, role play, and present competing arguments on controversial issues including: gun control, capital punishment, illegal (undocumented) immigration, torture as an interrogation technique, and the relationship between democracy, terrorism, and U.S. foreign policy goals. Students taking the special topics course: "Get Engaged: A Hands-On Approach to Civic Leadership" move beyond discussion into civic activism. They are required to define a problem, gather facts, build a coalition, identify decision makers, gauge public opinion, meet with decision makers, engage the media, use deadlines, trends and cycles to their advantage, and reflect on how they can capitalize on victory or learn from defeat (see *America, The Owner's Manual: Making Government Work for You* by Senator Bob Graham). In both cases, students actively work in groups to gather and to create new knowledge, and to determine and articulate their policy preferences.

Anonymous student comments demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach to student learning. Students frequently indicate that they thought more and learned more in my classes than in any other they have taken. They report increase interest in politics and political engagement. Most students enjoy the active learning that takes place in class and see the relevance of the course material to their own lives as engaged citizens. As their comments illustrate, students shared my enthusiasm for the course material. Students confronted different perspectives that challenged their assumptions and world views. According to Ken Bain (author, *What the Best College Teachers Do*), it is such challenges and discoveries that promote long-term learning. In order to assess my success in meeting the objective I set out for my active learning courses, I looked closely at student's anonymous end-of-the-semester qualitative evaluations. Evaluations for these

past three years were 99% positive. Students point to several important factors (multiple comments for each factor; one representative comment selected for each) that shaped their positive learning experience in my active learning courses:

**STUDENTS DESCRIBE THE COURSES AS THOUGHT-PROVOKING & INTELLECUALLY CHALLENGING:**

- In the beginning of the semester I had strong feelings on what I believed my views on political topics were. After progressing through the course, I feel much more aware of the lack of certainly I have on most of the issues covered. The course went extremely well for me, because I was challenged and feel I rose to that challenge.
  *Source: Fall 2010, POLS Y201, Political Controversies, Section 9961, anonymous evaluations*

**STUDENTS STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF GAINING NEW KNOWLEDGE:**

- [The most positive and important parts of my learning experience were] 1) the tie-in between 'where we come from' and how far we still have to go. There is so much work to do! Information empowers. Knowing history matters.
  *Source: Spring 2010, POLS Y327, Gender Politics in the U.S., Section 26274, anonymous evaluations*

**STUDENTS CELEBRATE CREATIVITY IN GETTING THE ENTIRE CLASS INVOLVED:**

- Dr. Bennion came up with creative ways to get the entire class involved in debates and participate in the class.
  *Source: Spring 2010, POLS Y201, Political Controversies, Section 4612, anonymous evaluations*

**STUDENTS APPRECIATE INSTRUCTOR COMMITMENT TO HELPING ALL STUDENTS MASTER THE MATERIAL:**

- Dr. Bennion was engaging. Dr. Bennion gave the impression that she really wanted you to learn and understand the material as opposed to just trying to make it hard.
  *Source: Spring 2010, POLS Y201, Political Controversies, Section 4643, anonymous evaluations*

**STUDENTS PRAISE INSTRUCTOR ENTHUSIASM ABOUT TEACHING & CONCERN FOR STUDENTS:**

- The instructor was very helpful when readings were difficult to understand and certain concepts that were unclear, she was able to clarify matters for me and overall just an enthusiastic teacher about her work.
  *Source: Fall 2010, POLS Y201, Political Controversies, Section 2634, anonymous evaluations*

**STUDENTS VALUE THE REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS OF THE SKILLS THEY DEVELOP:**

- The course challenged me in ways other courses have not; the fact that the course is hands-on allowed me to apply to my theoretical knowledge of political science to a "real life" policy problem. This class better prepared me for real-life challenges I will face in the future.
  *Source: Fall 2010, POLS Y200, Civic Leadership, Section 27669, anonymous evaluations*

As I move forward with my teaching, I hope to find more ways to provide course that challenge students, require them to think, get all students involved, and make them see the real-world relevance of the material we study. I will continue to focus on knowledge and skill

mastery of all students, rather than competition and curves. I will continue to focus on active learning that requires students to discuss and debate policies in class, and to work to solve social problems outside of class.

I welcome an opportunity to speak with other instructors about the specific assignments and instructional methods employed in these classes, and how to incorporate active learning strategies into your courses. Copies of my course syllabi are available upon request.

I also welcome suggestions you may have to share with me. I am always looking for ways to engage student more fully in the learning process. The *Political Science Educator* is one way we can share ideas and successful strategies. I look forward to hearing from you in a future issue!

## 6) Political Theory, Museum Studies, and Pedagogy

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Political theory instructors seeking to emphasize close textual analysis may find it challenging to teach in such a manner as to achieve a balance between the time-consuming task of modeling and underscoring a close reading of primary texts with the need to cover a broad range of works. Harry Berger, Jr. (2005, 495-496) has suggested that textual analysis, properly undertaken, requires a "basic exhortation to the student. . . 'always peruse,'" with the activity of perusing understood as "to go over again. . . thoroughly, carefully, critically" (495). Perusal can allow one to read closely enough to notice paradox (Springborg, 2009, 260), to identify a change in the movement of a

text's argument, or to recognize an emergent subtext. Moreover, if scholars like Melzer are correct in asserting that texts of political theory are more deeply implicated in esotericism than is often assumed, close reading is essential if students  are to be prepared to encounter multiple levels of writing in works that are often taught as canonical (Melzer 2006).

How can we teach political theory in a manner that enhances the perusal skills of our students? I believe that recent work in museum studies may offer possible strategies and insights. Historically, the word *museum* referred to an assemblage of knowledge that could take the form of an "idea or a book . . . or a room or a building, " (Starn 2005, 76).  Thus, theoretical interrogations of what it means to look at museum exhibits are not necessarily conceptually far removed from questions of what it means to read  texts.  For example, museum scholars have investigated how museums can function as canons, with major exhibits dictating to their visitors what counts as a knowledge.  Scholars have analyzed how museums can organize  exhibits to invite multiple interpretations or to produce "tamed stares" that look where a guide directs (Bonetti 2007, 172).  Museums problematize the multifaceted nature of looking/reading, as when decisions  about displaying artifacts in lighted glass cases prompt analysis of whether such frames promote a type of  viewing that mimics shopping for the best bargain in a store's display cabinet (Greenblatt 2004, 550). Indeed, Starn cites research suggesting that museum visitors, when asked, are "hard pressed to tell the difference between museum exhibits, exhibits in department stores or airports, and historic districts, or theme parks" (Starn 2005, 91).

In sum, museum studies scholars ask questions very similar to those asked by many teachers of

political theory, as we seek to better understand how the display of a text can affect its reception by our students and how we can better teach an approach to reading that distances itself from bargain hunting in texts for the lowest cost reading strategies.

Convinced that museum studies scholarship had something to teach me about the teaching of political theory, I began incorporating selected museum studies practices into my upper-level Modern Political Theory class of 26 students at the University of New Mexico in Spring 2011. Specifically, I introduced a variant of certain pedagogical practices I observed during five museum guide experiences in which I participated in London's National Gallery and London's Tate Britain on visits occurring in August 2010 and March 2011. Assuming no prior knowledge on the part of the visitors of any paintings, museum guides instructed viewers to notice flow or movement and foreground/background in four paintings over the course of an hour. Invariably, when asked open-ended questions by guides, viewers were able to point to flow (e.g., in a stream, in a figure's movement, in the direction of a crowd, in a weather pattern or shadow) and to identify spacing in foreground and background.

Struck by (a) the ease with which the guides drew this level of observation from the visitors in an hour in comparison with (b) the difficulty I had experienced in trying to teach students over the course of a semester to notice detail, evidence, and conceptual flow in texts, I created an assignment in which I asked students to examine and write about detail and flow in both (1)Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* and (2) a self-selected section of a political theory text about which they felt confident and to which they had committed the most time and analysis at that point in the semester.

I hypothesized that students would find it easier to see flow in a painting than in their texts, insofar as a painting's spatial frame discloses content within a field of vision that, at least on a cursory level (the level at which I was asking them to write about Titian in this assignment), is viewable all at once. In contrast, a book discloses primary and secondary themes over the course of chapters and, in many cases, hundreds of pages. I hoped to use this exercise (1) to show students they were capable of seeing flow visually in a painting and thus capable of recognizing it on an abstract/conceptual level and (2) to help them build on this confidence in seeing details in Titian that could then be applied to the level of attentiveness they took into their "looking" at political theory. I compared length and detail in the students' writing about the painting with that about their texts.

Twenty-one students were in class on the day of the assignment and participated in the exercise. Eleven students wrote more extensively and in greater detail about the movement in the painting, six wrote in greater detail about the movement they saw in their selected texts, and four wrote roughly equivalent amounts. Responses suggested that students who are confident in their ability to peruse texts may, at least at first, gain less from exposure to museum practices. It may also be the case that students in a theory class are less predisposed than museum goers to trust and share their personal observations of unfamiliar paintings.

However, students who report trouble with close reading may benefit from an exercise such as this. To illustrate, one student described the ease with which he saw movement in the Titian painting and the great difficulty he had been experiencing in noticing detail in his chosen

text; he also wrote that he struggled to read "with the approach of a student of political theory." The fact that eleven of twenty-one students wrote in a more thorough and detailed manner about the Titian painting suggests, at this preliminary level, the potential utility of using museum practices to help students identify and become comfortable with concepts relevant to textual analysis.

While it might initially seem strange to political scientists to look to museum studies, it is, perhaps, important to remember that some of the central concepts in political science—e.g., representation—originated as artistic or theatrical concepts (Viera and Runciman 2008, 4-7). The question central to my future research will focus on how to move beyond these preliminary findings in order to assess outcomes regarding whether—and if so how—exposure to museum practices has a demonstrable utility in assisting students in enhancing their skills in textual perusal.

References:
Berger, Jr., Harry. 2005. *Situated Utterances: Texts, Bodies, and Cultural Representations*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Bonetti, Roberta. 2007. "The Museum as an Inhabited Object." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 52 (Autumn): 168-180.

Greenbltt, Stephen. 2004. "Resonance and Wonder." In *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
Melzer, Arthur M. 2006. "Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism." *The American Political Science Review* 100 (2): 279-295.

Springborg, Patricia. 2009. "The Paradoxical Hobbes: A Critical Response to the Hobbes Symposium." *Political Theory* 37 (5): 676-688.

Starn, Randolph. 2005. "A Historian's Brief Guide to Museum Studies." *The American Historical Review* 110 (1): 68-98.

Viera, Monica Brito and David Runciman. 2008. *Representation.* Malden, MA: Polity.

### 7) Putting the Cart Before the Horse: Using a Capstone Project as a Program Assessment Tool

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Like many political scientists, we have been skeptical of assessment programs – particularly those imposed to meet larger institutional needs with no clear benefit for program development – generating (often meaningless) summative data. Thus we grumbled a bit last spring when an interim dean requested a five-year program assessment plan beginning with setting out capstone learning goals. The senior capstone independent research project has been a constant source of irritation since the major was created over two decades ago. We had the perennial faculty complaints: "The students aren't engaged. They are putting off the research until the last minute. They don't understand the necessity of having a well-developed research question. They are handing in reports not research…" As we outlined the capstone learning goals it hit us: we were expecting the students to do political science research, but we were teaching them politics.

By starting at the end – outlining the knowledge and skills we expect of students when they graduate – we were forced to reconsider our

**Table 6.1: Student Capstone Performance**

Baseline Data Fall 2010



*N=15*
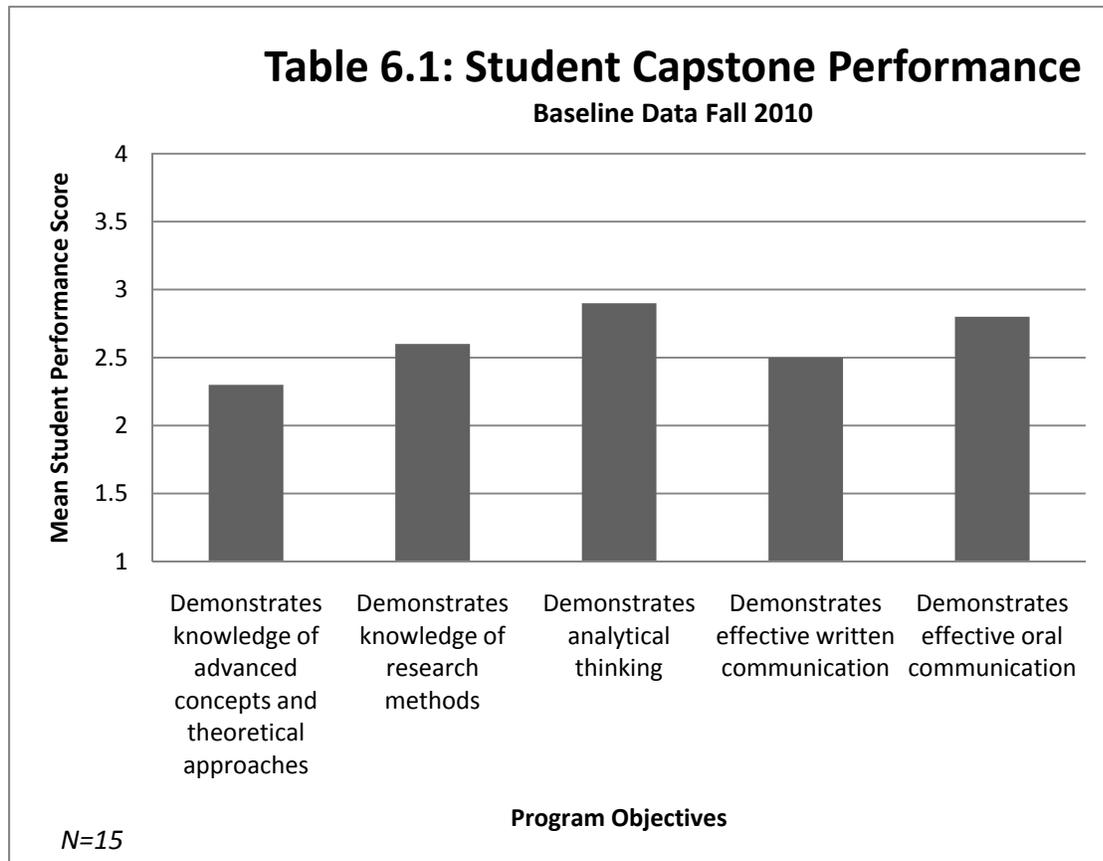
entire curriculum – reconsider, not renounce. We had introduced some piecemeal revisions to address our capstone woes: a required course in quantitative methods, adding a large methodological component to comparative politics and more research assignments in upper-level electives. These measures helped, but at least anecdotally our students did not appear to be meeting our learning goals. We needed a baseline. APSA's teaching and learning resources, particularly those developed through the political science education section, helped us develop appropriate assessment tools for this task.[1]

This fall we reorganized the capstone supervision process to increase the amount of faculty-student interaction (requiring a significant amount of unremunerated time on our part).

We developed two rubrics – one for the research paper and another for the oral presentation – to track our capstone learning goals and provide a baseline measure of student performance. Each of the several items on the two rubrics (measured on a scale of 1-4) was assigned to measure a specific program objective. Two faculty readers filled out rubrics

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[1] Of particular use are the Deardorff, Hamann, and Ishiyama volume on *Assessment in Political Science* and Sum and Light's July 2010 *PS* article

"Assessing Student Learning Outcomes and Documenting Success through a Capstone Course."

for each paper and all four of us evaluated the oral presentations.

As can be seen in the table above, our anecdotal evidence that students were not performing as well as we wished is supported by the data. Our goal is that each cohort will average a 3 or above in each category. This process allowed us to define our baseline prior to developing additional curricular changes to accomplish our program objectives. It will also help us assess those changes in the future. More information on our assessment plan can be found at www.sbu.edu/polisci.

## 8) Coming Attractions: An in-class group exercise for teaching theoretical concepts

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As a longtime TA, I have seen students struggle with learning how to think abstractly. Even students who have no trouble whatsoever memorizing textbook definitions can nevertheless run into difficulties when asked to apply theories creatively. This is a particular source of concern in introductory courses in international relations, given the prominence of the traditional paradigms (realism, liberalism, constructivism, and so on) in the curriculum and in most textbooks. Yet all too often instructors may not realize their students are having difficulty until the midterm, by which point it is too late to do much about it.

The exercise presented below draws on a set of tropes well familiar to any American movie-going audience to make these ideas more tractable. The standard movie trailer script, with its hyped-up and overly dramatic readings, is a descendant of the pioneering work of voiceover actor Don LaFontaine, who recorded more than

5,000 movie trailers and hundreds of thousands of commercials and television promotions.[2] His repertoire of clichés—"In a world where," "a hero will rise," "things are about to get [adjective]," and so on—are oddly well-suited to conveying how theories both attempt to describe the world and simultaneously construct a way of understanding the world. Just as movie trailers condense the plot of a film into a 60-second advertisement, so does this exercise show how political science theories collapse a complicated world into a relatively parsimonious story.

Using the tropes as a recipe, the 25-minute exercise calls on students working in groups to create a summary of a theory's main points. In preparation for the exercise, I normally assign students to watch a four-minute video from *Good Morning America* about LaFontaine (http://www.voiceoverresourceguide.com/la/10media.html#null) the evening before the assignment. The exercise combines interactivity and humor with rigor, as students seek to understand what does and does not fit into the theoretical "story" they are trying to tell.

The exercise as presented here draws on the security dilemma concept, as elaborated in Jervis, but could work for any contending group of theories that have differing ontological claims about the nature of the world. A successful group would link the premises of the position to the conclusions (e.g., "In a world where anarchy

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[2] For background, see Hevesi, Dennis. "Don LaFontaine, Voice of Trailers and TV Spots, Is Dead at 68." *New York Times*. 2 September 2008; McLellan, Dennis. "The booming voice behind thousands of movie trailers," *Los Angeles Times* 3 September 2008; and "Good Morning Don LaFontaine," a *Good Morning America* article from 2005 available on a variety of online video servers.

rules, one state is about to change the rules … by introducing nuclear weapons"). The script could also work for practically any theory, including concepts as varied as the V.O. Key three-part party model (the party in the electorate, the party in government, and the party as an organization) and contending viewpoints over democratization and transitology.

**Don LaFontaine Memorial IR Theory Exercise**

Working in groups of four to six, you will write a one-minute movie-trailer style exploration of a theme from a recent lecture in GOVT 006. One member of your group will present the trailer to the rest of the class in a dramatic (but not overly cheesy) reading. You will have approximately twenty minutes to complete this assignment. Your trailer should include some empirical claims, some theoretical claims, and a succinct exposition of the topic for which you are responsible.

**Table 1. The security dilemma and the offense-defense balance. Adapted from Taliferro 2008**

|  | **Offense advantage** | **Defense advantage** |
|---|---|---|
| **Offense/Defense Distinguishable** | (1) Doubly dangerous | (2) Security dilemma; security requirements may be compatible |
| **Offense/Defense Indistinguishable** | (3) No security dilemma, but aggression possible | (4) Doubly stable |

As with all Don LaFontaine–style trailers, your script **must** begin with the words "In a world …". You should also try to incorporate other clichés you may be familiar with from watching movie trailers. Remember: this is meant to be an exercise that demonstrates your command of the IR literature on your assigned topic. Thus, even though your exposition must be creative, it also has to show that you know the literature.

Each group will cover *one* of the quadrants in the security dilemma typology.
Write a script that explains how actors perceive the world in each quadrant, what the international security environment will be like in each quadrant. Feel free to use real-world examples, to employ topics that we've discussed in class (either in lecture or in readings), or to bring in plausible scenarios to illuminate your point.

## 9) Forthcoming Articles at the *Journal of Political Science Education*

A Computer Simulation Comparing the Incentive Structures of Dictatorships and Democracies
   Katsuo A. Nishikawa and Joseph Jaeger

Online Discussion, Student Engagement, and Critical Thinking
   Leonard Williams and Mary Lahman

Teaching Experimental Methods: A Framework for Hands-On Modules
   David Doherty

The International Studies Minor in Practice: Program Offerings and Student Choices
   Marijke Breuning and John James Quinn

The Impact of In-Class Service-Learning Projects
   Shannon Jenkins

Grading More Accurately
   Mark Carl Rom

Seeking a Just and Humane World: Motivating Minority Students to Become Global Citizens
   Pamela Waldron-Moore

**Special Joint Articles: Faculty and Student Perspectives on Undergraduate Research**
Shock and Awe: Rapid-Fire Theory, Some Surprising Survey Results, and Triage Statistics in an Applied Freshman Research Seminar

   Daniel Boyd Kramer and Michael G. Schechter

Connecting the Dots: The Tale of an Undergraduate Research Experience Investigating International Affairs Knowledge
   Benjamin Arbitter, Hannah Bach, Michael Berkowitz, Teresa Brown, and Kara Krebs

**Special Review Essay**
Two Views of a Conference Presentation: An Undergraduate's First Research Conference Experience
   Tyler Garaffa and Craig Leonard Brians

Any announcements or information for future newsletters should be sent to Shannon Jenkins at sjenkins@umassd.edu.