

Summer/Fall 2013 Newsletter

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Information

1) Message From the Section Chair

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As my term as the Political Science Education Section president ends, I am thrilled with how our membership is thriving and the goals that we have accomplished in the past two years. Since our last newsletter, our main event was the Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) in Long Beach in February. Our section co-sponsored the TLC opening reception, and it was such a success that the reception time was extended for an additional hour.

At the reception, we presented two awards: a Lifetime Achievement Award for Michael Brintnall and a Distinguished Service Award for John Ishiyama. It was an exceptional arrangement due to the cancellation of APSA annual. After reviewing some of their many accomplishments, I presented Michael with a gorgeous mantle clock with the following inscription: "With deepest gratitude for your countless hours of work for and devotion to quality teaching in political science." I noted how many of us (myself included) would not be involved in APSA without the creation of the TLC, which blossomed under his leadership. He has fundamentally transformed the organization and the discipline by promoting our role as effective educators. The choice of the clock amused him, now that he does not need to be at a certain place at a certain time. But for us, the clock signified how much time he has given to us and how his time is now his own. We wish Michael all the best in his retirement and will be forever grateful for his efforts.

John Ishiyama is the founding editor of the section journal, the *Journal of Political Science Education (JPSE)*, in addition to serving in many leadership roles in the section and in APSA. We presented him with a rotating desk globe to signify how, in his new role as editor-in-chief of the *APSR*, he now has the whole political science world in his hands. The inscription reads: "With appreciation for opening the world of scholarship of teaching and learning to all." John's dedication to the section and our goal of advancing quality research in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has been critical to our successes in this century. He exemplifies how excellence in teaching and research can be complimentary as opposed to contrasting pulls on our time, energy, and intellectual development. John – good luck in your new job and thank you for all that you have done.

With John's departure, our new *JPSE* editor-in-chief is Kerstin Hamann, who brings a solid record of published research and dedication to the section. I strongly recommend using the TLC and APSA annual conferences to develop

and test your own ideas on teaching and transform them into scholarship. These conferences, in addition to APSA regional conferences, are excellent venues to transform your work so that one day we can see your name on a *JPSE* article.

For the Annual APSA Meeting in Chicago, we will have a **combined section meeting/reception with open bar from 6:15-7:45pm on Friday, August 30**. The program lists the reception separately as going on until much later, but this information is the correct plan. Please plan to come by, grab a bite and a drink, meet other section members, and participate in our section's discussions. Remember – if we don't stay united to promote our interests, no one else will! If you would like to get an item on the section agenda, please contact me by August 20. Looking forward to seeing you in Chicago!

2) Tools for Active Citizenship

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The nature and extent of youth political engagement is an ongoing concern among educators, policymakers, and the public at large. As a discipline, political science has responded by exploring the role of civic education in the classroom, constructing instructional initiatives to foster active citizenship, and engaging in research to measure the effects of these efforts. The recent APSA volume *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen* edited by Alison Rios Millett McCartney, Elizabeth A. Bennion, and Dick Simpson synthesizes this work and calls on political scientists and their institutions to view civic education as a core component of their mission.

The companion website serves as an extension of this text and provides concrete examples of how educators from fields ranging from American government to comparative politics have built methods of teaching active citizenship into their coursework ([http://community.apsanet.org/TeachingCivicEngagement /Home/](http://community.apsanet.org/TeachingCivicEngagement/Home/)). Visitors can access sample syllabi, examples of class projects, and boilerplates for assessments that correspond to the chapters featured in the edited volume. In addition, lists of references for each section of the volume are provided.

This site will be an ongoing resource for educators and feature bibliographies of current journal articles and conference papers, "how to guides" for incorporating methods of instruction to foster active citizenship, and interactive platforms that will allow visitors to make comments and offer suggestions. Have an idea for the website or want to join the editorial group? Get in touch with the site editor, Elizabeth Matto of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University (ematto@rci.rutgers.edu). Play a part in making this resource a reliable touchstone for educators dedicated to preparing students to be active citizens.

The Teacher-Scholar

3) Challenging Beliefs to Promote Student Learning

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Students (and teachers) have a difficult time learning things that contradict their current understanding of the world; most of us believe that new information we receive confirms our earlier beliefs, theories, interpretations, and arguments. Often we seek out information that confirms these beliefs, while overlooking or avoiding contradictory views and data. When confronted with information that seems contradictory to what we believe, we perform "all kinds of mental gymnastics to avoid confronting and revising fundamental underlying principles" (Bain 2004, 23). And yet,

to learn and grow, we must confront competing theories and evidence. To teach effectively, and promote student learning, we must encourage our students to do so, too.

As Jose Antonio Bowen reminds us in his 2012 book, *Teaching Naked*, there is extensive research into how young adults learn and how they develop as well as how we can have a long-term impact on students' understandings of the world. A teacher-scholar studies this research, applies best practices, and conducts classroom action research to determine what works best in his or her own classroom. Here are a few key findings from existing research that we should keep in mind when seeking to promote deep (lasting) learning:

1. The conceptual model of the brain as fixed has been replaced by new evidence that the architecture of the brain is flexible and is constantly shaped by experience (Zull 2004, Bowen 2012, 76).
2. If a neuron fires often, it grows and extends itself out toward other neurons, connects with them, sends signals back and forth through synapses. Synapses convert the isolated neurons into a network of neurons. The changes in the connections that make up these networks is learning (Zull 2004, 68; Bowen 2012, 77).
3. Two things cause networks to form: practice and emotion. When learners practice, the brain grows (Dragnski et al. 2004, Bowen 2012, 77).
4. Lasting learning is motivated by emotion and solidified by practice (Damasio 1994, Bowen 2012, 78).
5. A lecture can motivate students and stimulate emotion, but it does not give them much practice at forming their own explanations and networks, or much control over their progress (Bowen 78).
6. The consistent theme in the existing literature is that learning requires more than just new facts; it is motivated by forcing students to confront, analyze, and articulate compelling discrepancies that require change in what they believe (Bowen 2012, 80).
7. The best college teachers introduce facts "in a rich context of problems, issues and questions"

(Bain 2004, 29). They understand that mental models change slowly; pre-existing beliefs are difficult to change.

8. Student motivation and preconceptions are important. If students learn new information for the purpose of a test, they quickly revert to their old ways of thinking (Bransford & Brown, 2000).
9. A metacognitive approach that combines factual knowledge with an emphasis on conceptual frameworks, applications, and student control over learning fosters deep/lasting learning (Bransford & Brown, 2000, Bowen 2012).
10. Neuroscience suggests that the positive emotions in learning are generated in the parts of the brains that are used most heavily when students develop their own ideas. The frontal cortex and pleasure centers deep in the brain are stimulated by student ownership and independent thinking, rather than by explanations (Zull 2004, Bowen 2012).
11. The brain is not a blank slate waiting to be written upon or an empty bowl waiting to be filled. Contexts for learning include student apathy, contradictions to belief systems, religious or political beliefs, educational background, and psychological development (Bowen 2012, 89).
12. To foster lasting learning, educators should “engage the whole brain: Instructors should provide experiences and assignments that engage all aspects of the cerebral cortex: sensory cortex (getting information), integrative cortex (making meaning of information), integrative cortex near the front (creating new ideas from these meanings), and motor cortex (acting on those ideas)” (Zull 2004, 71).

What does all of this research say about good teaching? Simply lecturing to students is less effective than active learning in developing high-order cognitive skills. Delivering context alone has virtually no effect on students’ beliefs about the world (Bowen 2012). As Bowen reminds us, students can memorize data that conflicts with their beliefs, but without active engagement with the new material in the form of discussions, writing, debates, projects, and hands-on applications, they do not really

consider the implications of the new content for their existing understandings, beliefs, and worldview (92). All of the research cited above is consistent with Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of education objectives, and Krathwohl’s (2001) revision of the taxonomy into the form most widely used today. By classifying cognitive skills into six levels of increasing complexity, with each higher level assuming mastery of all of the previous levels, we are reminded that the goal is not to test students on their ability to remember, retrieve, recognize, or recall relevant facts, but, rather, to produce students who understand key concepts, apply knowledge to solve new problems, analyze data, structures, or situations, evaluate programs, policies, and practices, and create new knowledge: generating new ideas, planning new programs, or producing new organizations that reflect their working knowledge and beliefs about politics, public policy, and the public good.

The best teachers focus on challenging students in a supportive environment where failure is tolerated. Ingredients for success seem to include both high standards and a low risk of failure (i.e. opportunities to experiment, fail, learn, and try again). Student learning thrives when opportunities for active learning combine with a sense of control and a belief that the professor wants them to succeed (Bain 2004). It’s a tall order, but we are up to the task. Colleagues, please share how you are helping students to challenge their existing mental maps and to gain new – and deeper -- understandings of the world around them. I look forward to hearing your stories of active learning using research-based best practices. Being a teacher-scholar means using the best research available to inform our teaching. Being a community of teacher-scholars means sharing best practices and research findings with others so that we may continue to learn and grow together. I am eager to hear from you! I am eager to learn.

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Featured Essays

4) What Are We Teaching When We Teach Engagement?

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The American Political Science Association includes a Civic Engagement Task Force, hosts regular Teaching & Learning Conference tracks on civic engagement, and published a monograph entitled *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen* in February 2013. What do political scientists teach when they teach engagement? What

learning outcomes to they promote and study in connection to their teaching and research? We conducted a comprehensive analysis of recently published articles in discipline-specific SoTL journals, "The Teacher" section of *PS: Political Science & Politics* and *The Journal of Political Science Education*, to answer these questions.

A total of 246 articles have been published in "The Teacher" since 2000, with 22 articles (8.9%) focused on civic engagement. These articles, reflecting the work of 33 teacher-scholars, include a discussion of service learning (15 articles), civic engagement (13 articles), political engagement (5 articles), and civic skills (1 article).

The Journal of Political Science Education (JPSE) was first published in 2005. Of the 161 articles published in Volumes 1-8, approximately one-quarter (28 articles, 23%) are focused on civic engagement. As in "The Teacher" section of *PS: Political Science & Politics*, articles in the *JPSE* report on service learning (24 articles), civic engagement (25 articles), political engagement (17 articles), and civic skills (4 article). Several articles in the *JPSE* also highlight the development of specific political skills, such as coalition building, engaging in evidence-based political discourse, and developing a strategic plan for political action (5 articles).

We are pleased to see that political scientists are publishing work that explicitly promotes and measures students' political engagement and the skills required to engage in our political system. The fact that only 27 of the 407 articles we reviewed – or less than seven percent--explicitly study *political* engagement concerns us given that we focused exclusively on scholarship published in political science journals. Civic engagement is promoted across the curriculum, but political knowledge and skills are commonly the domain the political science departments. We urge political science faculty to develop courses that teach the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for political engagement – and to publish the results of SoTL projects designed to test the

learning outcomes of such efforts. Democracy is not a spectator sports. Let's give our students the skills they need to play – and play well.

5) Bringing Teaching and Research Together: A Report of the 2012 React Labs Educate Presidential Study

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In the heat of the 2012 presidential campaign, we put out a recruitment call to the political science teaching and learning community to help us with a project aimed at examining the real-time effects of presidential debates. The motivation for our study stems from knowing that presidential debates are one of the most salient campaign events in the world (the first 2012 debate, for example, drew 67 million viewers; Nielsen 2012). And, growing evidence suggests that debates have important consequences for U.S. presidential elections: they boost viewers' political information (Benoit and Hansen 2004), help undecided voters choose (Geer 1988), and occasionally change voters' minds (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003; Geer 1988; Holbrook 1999; Lemert 1993). Additionally, presidential debates are a great opportunity to engage our students in the political process, as research shows that exposure to debates generally enables normative democratic attitudes in young citizens—reducing political cynicism and increasing political information (McKinney and Rill 2009).

Yet, we know little about which elements of debates are consequential. Because most

debate research compares viewers' attitudes before and after a debate, we have data on opinion change, but we cannot isolate the causal mechanisms underpinning this change; a plethora of individual moments – or an aggregation of these moments – may influence viewers, but identifying which moments are consequential requires more fine-grained data. We wanted to collect such fine-grained data, but we needed a very large group of study participants to make it possible.

Together with computer scientist Philip Resnik (University of Maryland), we designed an app to collect individual-level real-time response data during the 2012 debates. Our app (Figure 1) allowed viewers to respond to the candidate of their choice (or the moderator) by clicking one of four buttons: agree, disagree, spin, and dodge. Not only would this tool give us the detailed data we wanted, but it just might make students a little more enthusiastic about watching the debates.

With an app in our hands, a research question on our minds, and students in our classrooms, we were ready to collect data. But only utilizing the student populations we had immediate access to on our own campuses would not get us the sample size and diversity we wanted for this study. How could we access a population as large and diverse as we needed? We turned to a strategy of “crowdsourcing” from among our political science colleagues. You may recall hearing the recruitment call for this project through the political science education listserv, through other listservs, and/or on blogs like “The Monkey Cage”. We encouraged instructors from across the country to assign the app to their students in exchange for teaching resources about presidential debates and next-day results from the app data. We were bowled over by the great response we received: political science instructors from all 50 states signed up their classes and provided nearly 5,000 unique respondents. We are currently analyzing the massive amounts of data generated by this study and we recently presented some of our initial results at the

Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference.



Figure 1. React Labs: Educate App Interface

We have also learned a great deal about the process of calling on the academic community to participate in and help promote a study—or what we call “colleague crowdsourcing”. As we explain in the pedagogical paper presented at the Teaching and Learning Conference in February, we believe that colleague crowdsourcing presents a potential new model for bridging the gap between teaching and research. On the research side, the number and diversity of participants we were able to gather was far better than we could have achieved alone. On the teaching side, participating in the research exposed students to the political process and provided an opportunity for active learning. From anecdotal email exchanges, it seemed that instructors were eager to receive the teaching resources we provided, but even more eager to have a way of engaging their students with the presidential debates. Academia can be an isolating place; this project showed us that there is a demand for cross-campus collaboration on both teaching and research and, in an academic world where the relationship between the two often seems zero-sum, we found that it can be mutually beneficial.



At the UC Davis debate watch party on October 3, 2012, researchers watched live feedback from students across the country as they reacted to the candidates.

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6) Flipped Learning: Catapulting Students into the Deep End of Learning

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By now you may have heard about the “flipped classroom,” a teaching technique that has gained national attention at the K-12 level and has made its way into the lexicon of higher education pedagogical discussions.² In Spring 2013, students in my course, *Presidential Leadership in Domestic Policy Making*, engaged in a version of flipped learning. The term “flipped” refers to reorganizing how and when the students engage with the course material in and out of the classroom. For example, some of the basic, foundational concepts were delivered digitally outside of class, freeing in-class time for developing higher order thinking skills. In this essay, I discuss my experience employing a “flipped light model,” highlighting some benefits of this technique, as well as some areas where it worked less well.

The first step is to decide what concepts can be best delivered digitally outside of class, creating short “micro lectures” of five minutes or fewer, using voice-over-video to provide portions of the lecture typically given in class.³ Students were held accountable for both the micro lectures and the assigned reading through online quizzes (delivered in Blackboard, our course management system). In addition to making them responsible for the material, the quizzes served as a springboard for class discussion; the last question was often an open-ended question that invited them to place this new information within existing nexuses of

knowledge. This scaffolding of learning not only helps them understand and comprehend the ideas, but also it encourages more readily the higher order thinking skills of analysis and synthesis that we expect from advanced undergraduates. In addition, this technique maximized the likelihood that a greater proportion of the class would meet these course goals because the assessments reduced the “free rider” problem.

The time gained in class from “flipping” was used to engage in just this kind of deep learning in a variety of ways. At one point in the semester students worked through a role playing exercise in presidential decision making. Other times groups of students applied the foundational concepts to an example of presidential policymaking, with each group focusing on a different concept. Utilizing a version of “think, pair, share,” the groups then reported their analysis back to the whole class and the class debated which of the concepts were most crucial to evaluating presidential leadership.

There were also times throughout the semester when students were given class time to work on the class project: *Understanding Presidential Leadership Over Time*. Students self-selected into groups based on which presidential administration they wanted to research. Each individual student chose a case study of leadership, conducted research and wrote a substantial paper (15 to 20 pages) in which he or she applied the course concepts in an analysis of leadership. In addition, the groups worked collectively at two important stages of the process: 1) at the beginning, as they pooled their resources to gather information in common to each person in the group (e.g. White House organization, presidential personality) and 2) at the end of the semester, as they prepared for their day to teach the class about “their president.” The flipped format not only allowed time in class to accomplish this, but also, because explanations of fundamental course concepts were available “on-demand”, students could return repeatedly to this

¹ I would like to thank the members of the Professional e-Learning Community at UT Arlington for their encouragement and advice on this project.

² See, for example, an interesting article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Not Your Grandfather’s Comp. Class: Model Mixes Face Time and Technology” by Eric Hoover (March 18, 2013).

³ This is not the only option for delivering content. There are software programs that allow for longer videos; one could also video record an in-class lecture, or simply provide text.

material, thus deepening their understanding of presidential leadership.

There are potential benefits to “flipping,” but one must be aware of potential unintended consequences. For example, when queried, two of the thirty-five students reported that they preferred traditional lectures over online content. Additionally, many students perceived the workload in the flipped class to be high. My suspicion is that the actual level of perceived difficulty has remained fairly constant over time, but two things are different about the flipped class. First, the work expected on a day-by-day basis is much more explicit and transparent. Rather than saying, “read these pages during this week,” in the flipped paradigm my communication with students (about the reading, to integrate new concepts, etc.) flows seamlessly between “in-class” and “out of class.” The second difference follows from the first; I am quizzing them regularly on the degree to which they are meeting expectations and providing them on-going feedback on their progress. This information is useful to students because they can make course corrections earlier in the semester and be successful in the course. However, it does lay bare just how much work is involved to achieve success. For students to learn as deeply as professors want requires a significant commitment of time and effort. Perhaps as the “flipped” format encourages more students to complete a larger percentage of the work, it also allows less leeway for “slacking.”

This truth speaks to the last cautionary word: flipping is not for the faint of heart. In this pilot semester, not all components of the course were “flipped” and yet it required a significant investment of the professor’s time, most significantly in sharing with the students expectations for the class⁴ and in crafting the in and out of class experiences. While not all data

⁴ Students were told explicitly on the syllabus (and before the first day of class in a welcome video sent via email) about the flipped format. They were encouraged to reconceptualize the time they were normally expected to spend outside and in the classroom.

on student performance are yet available, my sense is that students realized the benefits of this structure. My hope is that their performance on other aspects of the course (exams and the paper) benefited from a) having my explanations of the core concepts (via videos) readily available throughout the semester, b) engaging in in-class exercises that allowed them to make connections among ideas and synthesize multiple lines of analysis and c) evaluating for themselves the applicability and utility of competing theoretical perspectives. All three of these activities were facilitated by the flipped learning environment.

7) Building a Model United Nations Program on Campus: Five Suggested Steps

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The benefits students receive from active learning, especially games and simulations, are well documented in the political science education literature.¹ Within the Model United Nations (MUN), simulations are designed to mimic negotiations that occur at the United Nations. Although MUN programs are very popular,^{4 2} there has been relatively little published research that assesses the benefits of such programs (Muldoon Jr. 1995; McIntosh 2001), or information on how to successfully build and grow such programs on college campuses. The purpose of this essay is to provide political science faculty members with five steps to help create and build a successful MUN program geared towards an internationalized curriculum.

¹ See for instance, *The Journal of Political Science Education*, special issue on “Simulations in Political Science,” 2013, 9(2).

² For instance, the 2012 National Model United Nations (NMUN) boasts an incredible participation rate, including 5,743 students from 399 colleges and universities—half of all these students are non-US participants. For more information, see the NMUN 2011-2012 Annual Report. Available at: http://www.nmun.org/downloads/2012%20NCCA%20Annual%20Report_Web.pdf

The first step we recommend is to demonstrate to your administration the importance and benefits of a MUN program. This can be done by providing a brief report describing why games and simulations are critical for building academic skills, but also for increasing social and academic integration (Ginn, Albert, and Phillips 2011). After receiving approval to create a program, we believe that successful programs should be offered for course credit. In fact, the optimal situation would be offering a course in the fall on the United Nations (UN), and then the actual Model United Nations course in the spring, with the UN course being a pre-requisite. When the two-course scenario is impractical, we encourage a single MUN course for credit, which should encourage students to take the program seriously and to do their best, not solely for competitive reasons, but also for their GPA.

The second step we recommend is that the program be jointly run through the department and with the Study Abroad Office (SAO). The actual trip component of the program can be run much more effectively as a “Study Away” trip, run by the SAO, which is staffed with people trained to handle the components of taking groups of students to off-campus sites for longer periods of time. Running the program with the SAO can minimize the time professors need to spend planning the trip, fundraising for the trip, and coordinating all the travel, so that they can instead prepare the students with classroom activities.

The third step concerns course design. Over the years, we have discovered, through trial and error, what we feel is the best way to structure the course to facilitate success at the conference, as well as overall academic importance. First, students should be responsible for writing the Position Paper needed for participation in MUN conferences. You should spend several class days explaining what should be in the paper, and then you should allow several revisions on the paper. Not only does this present a final polished

paper, but it also teaches students skills that will one day be needed if they choose to publish in political science, or if they ever need technical writing skills more generally. Once position papers are completed, you should spend additional time prepping students on resolution writing, something of critical importance during the conference.

Next, you should require the students to give formal speeches on the three topics that they will discuss in their committees at the MUN conference. For the MUN conference that our university participates in, there are three topics per committee. We also provide positive feedback from professors and their peers immediately after the speeches, and provide constructive criticism as well. This generally increases student confidence in their public speaking ability. Finally, a majority of the remaining class time should be spent in simulations. You should allow the class ample time to experience what the conference will be like beforehand; run the class for several weeks according to your conference of choice, and follow its rules of procedures. Make sure students stay in character and try to pass at least one resolution before ending the simulation. If well prepared, students will not only learn how theory meets practice concerning world politics, but they will also have a chance to succeed at a competition, which only bolsters further ambition.

The fourth step we recommend is that your MUN delegation should spend additional time in the city of origin for MUN conferences, such as New York City or Washington, DC, than just the actual conference. Traveling provides an amazing opportunity for students to experience another city with their classmates and professors, and this experience greatly increases social integration, which can help increase student persistence, higher academic performance for participating students, and facilitate higher graduation rates (Sutton and

Rubin 2004; Young 2007-2008).³ When participating in a MUN conference, taking the students to historical sites, networking events with alumni, and especially, foreign consulates or embassies of the country your campus is representing are all added highlights that propel students forward in their college careers and may attract them to permanent careers in political science. These are the experiences that are remembered for lifetimes.

Finally, our fifth and final step is one of advice to the program professors: Have fun and let your students see your ambition and energy for MUN. Ambition feeds ambition, and energy feeds energy. Have fun, and so, too, will your students.

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8) Teaching Urban Politics and Elections

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Through various media accounts, West Baltimore has long been perceived as an example of urban decline. Such neighborhoods – rife with violent crime, drug addiction, poverty, struggling schools, low educational attainment, unemployment, voter apathy and low turnout – are the culmination of years of disinvestment as well as political and economic neglect. Teaching urban politics requires a serious treatment of the aforementioned issues that are endemic to inner city neighborhoods. As a political scientist living in West Baltimore, my teaching is largely influenced by community and political engagement in Baltimore City. Many of the examples that I use in class lectures come directly from on-the-ground encounters and observations. Moreover, experiential learning is critical to political engagement among young people, as real-life opportunities allow for a more nuanced understanding of politics.

While many students learn about urban politics in a suburban or rural setting, it is quite instructive to shift the educational environment to the city. In this case, the classroom was not only the city, but Baltimore City on Election Day 2011. Having students from a suburban campus participate in an urban election highlights some of the divisions in metropolitan areas. Towson is a predominately White institution, whereas Baltimore City is majority Black, and the 9th District is also majority Black with large swaths of poverty. For many of the students, this class is their first serious exposure to urban issues, including frank discussions of race and class. On Election Day, students acted as poll workers and spent several hours at the various voting precincts. They handed out literature and interacted with voters, volunteers, candidates, and election judges. Rather than making the exercise mandatory, it was presented as an extra credit opportunity prior to any tests or quizzes, which allowed for self-selection.

³ Although these articles address the benefits and learning-outcomes of study abroad, we believe the benefits apply to study away programs as well.

While students got a chance to observe their surroundings, I also had several opportunities to observe how students adapted to the election environment. Student reflections regarding the experience were quite insightful and were differentiated due to a number of factors (e.g. polling location, student personality, time of day, previous experience, etc). These were shared during class discussions as well as in reaction papers. In class, we also discussed explanations for the election results – incumbent victory and the lowest voter turnout in city history. There were a variety of experiences, as some locations were busy and others were slow; the slowness at many polling locations was indicative of the low voter turnout. Also students shared unsolicited observations of other candidates’ interactions with voters and workers as well as the enforcement and non-enforcement of rules by election judges. Some students wrote about the conditions in the neighborhoods and their feelings about them. Others remarked how geographically close the area was to their college campus, yet so different in appearance.

In the absence of major national elections, many college students tend to not be very politically engaged. However, civic and political engagement goes beyond basic political knowledge and voting, but also includes seeking office and supporting candidates and/or political causes. We must be thoughtful about what we are preparing students for and how they will be able to function in diverse and sometimes unfamiliar settings. Being both a political science professor and a candidate for local office provided a unique experience to expose students to the applied aspect of the discipline. Also, it was the years of living in the community and developing relationships that allowed me to run as a credible, yet ultimately unsuccessful, candidate. Granted, there are some potential limitations based upon a university’s location and the political activism of professors. Nevertheless, this example can be replicated if other political scientists are willing to forge relationships with local political actors and/or become candidates themselves.

9) Emerson and Douglass in the Political Science Classroom

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In the summer of 2011, I had the opportunity to attend a week-long NEH¹ seminar on the American Lyceum at Northeastern University in Boston. The seminar focused on the role of oratory in forcing social change in the nineteenth century. I left Boston with a renewed interest in this pivotal time in American history, but also with a profoundly enhanced knowledge of orators like John Goff, Henry David Thoreau and Abby Kelly Foster. However, two particular historical figures stuck out – not necessarily because their views were new to me, but because I realized how applicable their thoughts could be in stimulating lively discussion in oftentimes torpid American government classes. They were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Frederick Douglass, and specifically, it was two of their speeches that we read and were also performed for us by period actors – “Self Reliance” and “Self-Made Men,” respectively.

Taken together, both essays – though Emerson’s started out as a sermon and Douglass’ as a speech – allow students to reflect on topics like individual versus community responsibility and the elusiveness of the American Dream; topics which frequently come up in political discourse in this country. After assigning excerpts from both essays,² I pose a series of questions for which I ask essay-based responses. The questions range from the general – “Do you believe you are self-reliant?” and “Is the American Dream open to everyone?” – to the specific: “How is Emerson’s notion of self-reliance represented in current

¹ This project was inspired and funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities Workshops on American History and Culture. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

² In their original forms, both essays are very long, so I have cut them down to five to six pages each.

debates on welfare reform?” or “What would Douglass think of affirmative action?”

Based on my students’ responses, I have identified five major themes that come up in my students’ work based on this assignment. First, this assignment can be simultaneously difficult and also rewarding for non-native English speakers (NNES). While several students struggled with Emerson’s and Douglass’s prose, a curious occurrence arose – these very same students wrote that learning English was their own form of self-reliance! This particular demographic may require extra time and advising so they turn in the best work.

Second, religion and culture were major themes in these essays. While some students suggested that God gave them the ability to be self-reliant, others suggested that their particular cultural traditions, often religious-based, did not permit them to be truly self-made. According to one student, a refugee from Afghanistan, “When one grows up in countries where the parents hold the girls’ futures, one cannot help but feel that neither individualism nor self-reliance exist ... I have always felt that my future is being decided for me, neither by God nor by me, but it is my family who decides my future.”

Race is a major theme in the responses, as well. While most students do not believe that Douglass would have supported affirmative action, many wrote that he also would not be happy to see Blacks given so few opportunities. One student, a 17-year old African-American female, said, “Whether it is blatantly obvious or not, a person’s skin color can either help or hurt their chances of being successful. For most minorities, their chances of reaching their own destiny are greatly reduced by the fact that they are of the minority race in our country.”

Race is also tied to another theme that presents itself over and over again in these essays – welfare. For many, the notion of race, particularly as a minority, and being dependent on the government for assistance, go hand in hand. A particularly cogent essay by one student stated: “As a black male I have seen my

own family, friends and neighbors become dependent on government assistance, which comes with more policing and intrusion to their homes, families, children and personal privacy. I personally do not believe in a two-party system. While Democrats breastfeed and coddle the disenfranchised, the Republicans break the rod on their backs. Both parties end up killing the average urban family.”

The last recurrent theme in my students’ responses to Emerson and Douglass is the overwhelming feeling that, although America was built by those who believed in individualism, this belief is fading among the younger generation. It was riveting, and also slightly depressing, to read young students’ beliefs about how their own upbringing, as well as that of their peers, was stymieing America’s potential. One student wrote: “Do Americans still believe in self-reliance? I would have to say, no. There are too many individuals in this world who rely on others. It’s sad to say, but most of the young adults in America are not aware of what it takes to be a hard worker and how it furthers you in life to become successful ... There are too many spoiled children today, who are used to their parents giving them financial stability, so there’s not even an awareness of what it is to be self-reliant.”

While some academics suggest that Emerson is too esoteric and unwieldy for our students to analyze (Major and Sinche 2010), I politely, but firmly, disagree. Based on my students’ responses to this particular assignment, they “got” Emerson, as well as Douglass, and wrote focused and sharp responses to my questions. As educators, our responsibility does not end when we assign a reading; rather, that is when our responsibility really begins because we must then offer avenues to get their minds racing and to draw out their potential. Anything less is tantamount to giving up.

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Conference Report

10) My Place is Here: Reflections From a First-Time Attendee to the 2013 APSA Teaching and Learning Conference

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It was my first time attending the American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) and I was not supposed to be going alone. I was one of several co-authors of a piece accepted to the 2013 TLC in Long Beach, California. Due to a series of last minute decisions and mishaps, however, I found myself winging my way to the west coast as our sole representative. Although I am by no means a wallflower or wilting violet, I was apprehensive about not knowing anyone. I was worried that I would be lost in the shuffle— a lone graduate student, whom no one recognized, on the edge of receptions and panel discussions.

Fortunately, my nervousness was quickly laid to rest. My airport shuttle was filled with others going to the conference, and on our way to the hotel, we traded credentials, plans for panels, and lamented the unseasonably cool weather. I was not alone, I realized -these are my colleagues! This sense of community permeated my entire trip and was one of the most striking features of the TLC. I have attended other disciplinary conferences, but I had never before felt so much a part of the discipline itself. This sense of belonging was fostered by the track orientation of the conference.

As anyone who has attended APSA's TLC knows, the conference is organized around tracks. Instead of allowing attendees to drift from

panel to panel, the expectation is that you will attend your track sessions each day and participate in a robust discussion with that group. For me, this was quite a different take on the typical conference experience. In my graduate education track, there were approximately fifteen participants. A ready and stable audience, for three days we listened carefully to each presentation, provided feedback, and discussed points of synthesis among research projects. The dynamic of the group was aided by the pedagogical skills of our chair, John Ishiyama, and the diversity of experience of track participants. The group included graduate students as well as full professors, all from a broad range of institutions, both within the U.S. and abroad, including representatives from Brazil and Saudi Arabia. Needless to say, every moment was interesting and you could literally feel the enthusiasm transform the room. Together we became a classroom. I imagine that this was no happy accident, but rather the consequence of careful reflection and planning among dedicated conference organizers.

I also do not think my experience was unique. Throughout the conference, I observed that my fellow attendees were passionate about their work, especially their teaching, and were eager to meet, greet, and share ideas. They drew me into their conversations, encouraged me, and offered helpful suggestions. From the opening remarks by Jane Mansbridge and an illustrative panel, to the closing reception and keynote speaker, Michael Brintnall, everything about the conference was geared toward collaboration, discourse, and fostering a sense of belonging. At the end, I thought, "my place is here, this is my community." To everyone I met— I will see you next year in Philadelphia!

Film Review**11) Mr. Cao Goes to Washington: A Film by S. Leo Chiang**

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In this film, Mr. Cao is a pure and seemingly unadulterated candidate, who wins an unlikely election, which sends him to Washington. This makes him the first of this sort in a very long time, perhaps since the mythical Mr. Smith. The film's title establishes the frame through which many viewers will understand the candidacy and election of Representative Cao, a Vietnamese American Republican, who gets elected in the majority minority Black 5th district in New Orleans. In a modern take on the naïve candidate going to Washington, this documentary touches on many important themes that will prove useful in any number of political science courses.

Mr. Cao's election is unlikely because of the demographic makeup of his district. The district cast 75% of its votes for Barack Obama in 2008, and its population is mostly Black. The FBI sting of incumbent William Jefferson (D), who was caught with \$90,000 in his freezer, sets up the situation that allowed for a Republican to win office in 2008. Despite the charges of corruption, William Jefferson is able to eke out a win in the Democratic primary. In a district that almost never sees a Republican challenger, Mr. Cao, a former independent candidate for state office, is sought out by a local Republican leader and asked to run. Although Joseph Cao placed fifth out of the six candidates in his previous run for state office, several Republican leaders took notice of him because of his idealistic motives to change things for the better.

The first compelling theme to emerge in the documentary is that of representation. Joseph Cao, an independent turned Republican, is moderate in his views. Constituents comment on how Representative Cao is really a Democrat, but that "he just doesn't know it." Cao is an elected official without strong loyalty to either party. He explains that he became a

Republican because he was sought out by that party to run in the 5th district; he was previously a self-identified independent. His weak partisanship allows him to make decisions not based on what is best for his party, but based on what he believes will be best for his constituents. For example, during the 109th session of Congress (2009-10), he cast votes with the Democratic Party 68% of the time. Because of his willingness to cross party lines and vote for his district's interests, Cao forges what he believes to be a special relationship with President Obama. As Cao sees it, he is positioned as the most important member of the House (a moderate who frequently crosses party lines), and he believes he can use this leverage to benefit his constituents.

The relationship between partisanship and district interests is perhaps further complicated by the fact that, although his district is predominantly black and Democratic, his primary constituency (those who worked to get him elected and raised money for him) is mostly conservative white Republicans. This tension is made painfully apparent through a scene in the documentary in which a citizen calls out Representative Cao as being "anything anyone wants" during his re-election bid in 2010; a stark contrast to the idealist candidate Cao believes himself to be. Professors and students alike will find this theme compelling, given the current highly polarized state of Congress.

A second theme present in the film is the role of race in representation, specifically the role of a Vietnamese American, who unexpectedly gets elected in a minority majority Black district. While the filmmakers do not focus much attention on this aspect of the film, there is plenty for professors and students to consider. Mr. Cao's term in Congress raises questions about the validity of descriptive representation claims and whether someone who is not African American is the best person to represent a predominantly African American district. It is unfortunate that the documentary does not touch upon Mr. Cao's attempt to join the Congressional Black Caucus once he won election, or the rebuff of those efforts.

Representative Cao is shown as attempting to build relationships within his district by emphasizing his Christian ties to Black ministers, as well as by highlighting his non-whiteness. Classroom discussion can also touch on the creation of majority minority districts, whether they serve the purpose for which they were intended, and how successful representatives from these districts have been in advancing the views of their minority constituencies.

The most compelling part of the story is the one for which the title of the documentary was selected, a naive candidate who believes in the force of good and the power of government to create change. Unfortunately for the re-election prospects of Representative Cao, he

has to face the hard reality of politics. This is best portrayed in the film when President Obama, who cultivated a relationship with Cao - perhaps for political gain, endorses his opponent's candidacy in a series of television advertisements for the 2010 election. Anyone who understands politics is not surprised at all by the defeat of Cao in 2010, but one realizes just how special Mr. Cao is by how crushed and hurt he is from not winning re-election.

This documentary is highly recommended for use in any number of political science courses (American Politics; Parties and Elections; Congress; or Race and Politics). Originally aired on PBS, you can find more information about the film at: <http://mrcaofilm.com/>

Announcements

- **Kerstin Hamann, Philip H. Pollock, and Bruce M. Wilson** received the 2012 APSA Information Technology and Politics (ITP) Section Award for "Learning Innovations in Information Technology and Politics" for their paper "Spill-over Effects in Online Discussions? Assessing the Effectiveness of Student Preceptors."
- **Shyam Sriram** received a "Certificate of Merit" as an Emerging Leader in Teaching at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Georgia Political Science Association, Savannah, GA. Sriram is also the author of "To Be a Rock and Not to Roll: Promoting Political Literacy through Music and Mixtapes" in the recent volume *Teaching Politics Beyond the Book: Film, Text and New Media in the Classroom*, edited by Robert W. Glover and Daniel Tagliarina, Bloomsbury Press, 2012.
- The **Annual American Political Science Association Meeting** will be held in Chicago this year, **Thursday, August 29 through Sunday, September 1**. For details, please see the APSA website: <http://www.apsanet.org/2013/>. Section panels for next year's annual meeting are allocated on the basis of attendance at this year's panels, so please attend as many of the Section's panels as you are able.
- The **Political Science Education Section Business Meeting and Reception** (hors d'oeuvres and open bar) will be combined this year and held on **Friday, August 30, 6:15 - 7:45 p.m., Palmer House Salon 3, 3rd Floor**. If you have any items that you would like to place on the meeting agenda, please let Alison McCartney know by **August 20: amccartney@townson.edu**
- The **APSA Teaching Awards Reception** will be held on **Friday, August 30, 7:30 – 8:45 p.m., Palmer House Hilton, Grant Park Parlor**. It is hosted by the APSA Committee on Teaching and Learning, and sponsored by Pi Sigma Alpha.
- There are numerous **APSA short courses** of interest this year. For more information, please see: https://www.apsanet.org/mtgs/program_2013/shortcourses.cfm. A newly added short course

sponsored by the Political Science Education Section, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Georgetown University and the University of Redlands is: **"Teaching Civic Engagement."** It is **FREE** and scheduled for **Wednesday afternoon, 28 August, 1 – 3 p.m.** The workshop introduces the newly published APSA book, *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen*, and provides opportunities for both beginners and those looking to enhance existing courses and programs. It includes topics such as developing both individual civic engagement courses and larger programs, publishing as part of the scholarship of teaching and learning, working with community partners and administrators, and working with co-curricular activities, among others. If you are interested in this short course, please contact APSA to sign-up today. A wine and cheese reception will follow at one of the main conference hotels.

- Finally, the annual **APSA Teaching and Learning Conference will be held February 7 – 9, 2014 in Philadelphia.** We hope to see many of you then!

Please send any article submissions or announcements for future newsletters to Maureen Feeley at mfeeley@ucsd.edu. Contributions may be as brief as 200 – 500 hundred words, but should not exceed approximately 1000 words, and should use APSA citation style. Please include "PS Educator submission" in the subject line of your email. Thank you!

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Maureen Feeley, Newsletter Editor.