Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of the Political Science Education Section Executive Committee, I hope each of you is experiencing a fulfilling semester of teaching and learning. This past year gave many of us an exceptional opportunity to learn from one another in the first TLC at APSA in Boston. We are going to continue this experiment with another TLC in APSA in Washington this fall. APSA is very interested in encouraging our section to play an active role in future TLC planning activities. Indeed, the section is always interested in recruiting members to become more active in a variety of our activities (e.g., serving on award committees, as discussants, as well as on future program and planning committees).

The Political Science Education Executive Committee include the following members:

Patrick McKinlay, President (2017-2019) Morningside College Email: mckinlay@morningside.edu

Terry Gilmour, Vice-Chair | Secretary (2017-2019) Midland College Email: tgilmour@midland.edu

Joseph Roberts, Treasurer (2016-2019) Affiliation: Roger Williams University Email: jroberts@rw.edu

Bobbi Gentry, Editor of The Political Science Educator Bridgewater College Email: bgentry@bridgewater.edu

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The Political Science Educator
The Newsletter of APSA’s Political Science Education Section

Winter/Spring 2019 Newsletter

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Information
Message from Section President
Patrick McKinlay, Morningside College
The 2019 APSA Annual Meeting Section Program Co-Chairs: Mary Ann McHugh (Merrimack College) and Elizabeth Mattio (Rutgers University). I want to thank all of the officers for their time and talent helping to manage the Section’s business between meetings.

We wish to congratulate all of the efforts to make the first TLC at APSA a success. In particular, we want to thank Renee Van Vecten and Allison McCartney for their efforts to co-chair the first TLC at APSA. We also appreciate Michael Rogers outstanding efforts as program chair for the Section’s 2018 Program.

At the business meeting, the section welcomed Steve Smith to discuss the last details for the following day’s TLC events. The section also took action on a proposal from the APSA Committee on the Status of Graduate Students regarding graduate student fees for the section. After some discussion, the section voted in favor of eliminating dues for graduate students. Before adjourning, the section announced our 2018 section award recipients. Donald Gooch received the Best APSA Conference Paper Award for his paper, “Structuring Civic Education: Assessing Civic Literacy Retention and Curricular Sequencing.” Fletcher McClellan received the Craig L. Brians Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research and Mentorship. And finally, the section recognized John Ishiyama with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his many contributions to both the section and to the discipline.

This year’s theme for the APSA Annual Meeting is “Populism and Privilege.” We hope that you will plan to attend the meeting to support our section. Finally, our award committees are in place and ready to receive (self) nominations/submissions for our 2019 Awards.

Below are the committee chairs and committee members who will receive your (self) nominations/submissions DUE by APRIL 1, 2019:

The Craig L. Brians Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research and Mentorship Chair: Carlos Huerta, Texas A&M Corpus Christi (juan.huerta@tamucc.edu), Committee Members: Fletcher McClelland (Elizabethtown College) and Allison McCartney (Towson University)

The Best APSA Conference Paper Award Chair: Michael Rogers, Arkansas Tech University (Mrogers6@atu.edu), Committee Members Bobbi Gentry (Bridgewater College) and Terry Gilmour (Midland College)

The Lifetime Achievement Award Chair: Sherri Wallace (Sherri.wallace@louisville.edu) Committee Members: Executive Committee

The Distinguished Service Award Chair: Sherri Wallace (Sherri.wallace@louisville.edu ) Committee Members: Executive Committee

We are excited about the new opportunities that 2019 holds for Section. Of course, its success relies on the engagement and creativity of our members. As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions at any time.

Wishing you much teaching and learning success,
To move beyond vague goals to produce measurable civic learning objectives, those designing the political or civic learning activities should first describe what participants should be able to do. In the case of student learning objectives, the outcome statement should specify what knowledge, skills, and attitudes successful learners will exhibit following instruction. Do not focus on the activity (e.g., “My plan is to talk about…”), instead focus on the resulting cognitive, affective, or kinesthetic outcomes (e.g., “After this session, students will be able to…”). A clear civic learning objective will connect content and assessment, guide selection of learning activities that will best achieve the desired outcomes, give learners a clear picture of what to expect and what is expected of them, and form the basis for evaluating teacher, learner, activity, and/or curriculum effectiveness.

Before writing learning objectives, it is important to decide what type of learning is desired. Two useful approaches to categorizing types of learning are described by Bloom and colleagues (1956) and Fink (2003). Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy (1956) includes six types of cognitive processes, arranged as a hierarchy. The lowest level, Knowledge, is primarily content-oriented. It consists of three subcategories: knowledge of specifics, knowledge of ways and means of dealing with specifics, and knowledge of universals and abstractions in a field. Observation and recall of information, knowledge of dates, events, and places, knowledge of major ideas, and mastery of subject matter all fit into this category. Other categories include Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation.¹

Comprehension includes such abilities as understanding information, grasping meaning, interpreting facts, and translating knowledge into new contexts. Application includes the ability to use methods, concepts, and theories in new situations, or solve problems using required skills and knowledge. Synthesis requires an ability to use old ideas to create new ones, to generalize from given facts, and to relate knowledge from several areas. Meanwhile, evaluation includes the ability to assess the value of theories, verify the value of evidence, and make choices based on reasoned argument. Bloom’s model assumes that acquisition of these skills is cumulative; that is, students master one level of skills before taking on the next.²

Another popular taxonomy is L. Dee Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning. Fink’s taxonomy involves both cognitive and emotional dimensions. Fink stresses that significant learning “requires that there be some kind of lasting change that is important in terms of the learner’s life.”³ Fink’s first three categories, Foundational Knowledge, Application, and Integration, correspond to Bloom’s six stages. An additional three categories focus on more emotion-based outcomes: The Human Dimension (recognizing human significance), Caring (developing new feelings or interests), identify three types of content in Bloom’s original hierarchy: “factual,” “procedural,” and “conceptual,” and add a fourth type, metacognitive knowledge. Metacognitive knowledge involves awareness of and knowledge about one’s own processes of acquiring knowledge and understanding. The metacognitive dimension recognizes that in order to solve everyday problems people need to know how to seek out and evaluate information.

² A group of education specialists developed a revised version of Bloom’s Taxonomy that separated the cognitive processes or skills from content type. See Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl et al., A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Abridged Edition. (New York: Longman, 2001). Anderson and Krathwohl identify three types of content in Bloom’s original hierarchy: “factual,” “procedural,” and “conceptual,” and add a fourth type, metacognitive knowledge. Metacognitive knowledge involves awareness of and knowledge about one’s own processes of acquiring knowledge and understanding. The metacognitive dimension recognizes that in order to solve everyday problems people need to know how to seek out and evaluate information.
and Learning How to Learn (developing one’s own path to knowledge). Rather than hierarchical, Fink concludes that learning is most significant when it spans across categories.

Both Bloom and Fink provide a solid framework for determining appropriate learning outcomes and finding suitable verbs that clearly express key learning objectives. For example, Bloom’s taxonomy might generate the following list of active verbs (and many more)⁴:

**Knowledge** (Recall and Understanding): Associate, Compare, Contrast, Define, Describe, Differentiate, Distinguish, Label, List, Name, Paraphrase, Provide example, Recognize, Repeat, Restate, Review, Show, State, Summarize, Tell

**Application**: Calculate, Demonstrate, Draw, Employ, Estimate, Illustrate, Locate, Measure, Operate, Perform, Prescribe, Record, Set up, Sketch, Solve, Trace, Use

**Problem-Solving** (Analyzing, Synthesizing, Evaluating): Advocate, Analyze, Assess, Challenge, Compose, Conclude, Construct, Create, Critique, Debate, Decide, Defend, Derive, Design, Evaluate, Formulate, Infer, Judge, Organize, Plan, Propose, Rank, Recommend, Select, Suggest

Fisk’s addition of the human dimension (i.e. what learners should know about themselves and about interacting with others) and the caring dimension (i.e. what changes in learners’ feelings, interests, and values are important) are particularly relevant to civic and political learning goals. Most instructors and institutions believe that knowledge-based civic education is not enough (on its own) to produce engaged citizens. Knowledge, skills, and values are all important in creating citizens with the capacity and desire to make a meaningful difference in their communities.

Active verbs addressing the human dimension focus on learners’ interpersonal relationships, self-authorship (i.e. the ability to create and take responsibility for one’s own life), leadership skills, cultural sensitivity, teamwork skills, citizenship commitments, and environmental ethics. Verb options include: collaborate, communicate, cooperate, empathize, inspire, interact, lead, mediate, mobilize, motivate, negotiate, nurture, reconcile, resolve, and respect. Action verbs might also include compound verbs such as: critically reflect, interact with, respond sensitively, resolve conflict, serve as a role model, suspend judgment, and take responsibility.

Fisk’s “caring” dimension includes a learner’s attitudes about learning (i.e. wanting to master the material, desiring to achieve high standards, and developing a keen interest in the subject), but also a commitment to “live right” (to take care of one’s health and well-being, or to live by a certain code). Useful verbs include: discover, explore, express, pledge, revitalize, share, and value. Compound verbs might include: be ready to, commit to, decide to, get excited about, recognize the value of, renew interest in, and take time to. Well-written learning objectives use precise terms that focus on the students rather than the curriculum. The use of active verbs keeps programs, teachers, and learners focused on what students will be able to do when they complete the learning experience.

**NOTE**: Excerpted from Elizabeth A. Bennion, “Moving Forward with Assessment: Important Tips and Resources,” in *Teaching Civic Engagement across the Disciplines*, ed. Elizabeth M. Matto, Alison Rios Millett McCartney, Elizabeth A. Bennion, and Dick Simpson

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⁴ Useful charts matching Bloom’s and Fisk’s taxonomies to a wide range of active verbs, objects, and sample learning objectives is available at [https://www.mtsac.edu/fclt/docs/EffectiveUseofLearningObjectives.pdf](https://www.mtsac.edu/fclt/docs/EffectiveUseofLearningObjectives.pdf). Source: “Effective Use of Performance Objectives for Learning and Assessment (For Use With Fink’s and Bloom’s Taxonomies),” *Teacher & Educational Development*, University of New Mexico School of Medicine, 2005.
In the area of civic education and engagement, one must determine what knowledge, skills, values, or behaviors are most important, or most directly related to the course, curriculum, program, or activities for which the assessment is taking place. One area to assess is civic knowledge. The type of knowledge you assess as "civic knowledge" is dependent, in part, on your disciplinary perspective. Political scientists may emphasize knowledge of the legislative process, how a bill becomes a law, or the role interest groups and lobbyists play in shaping public policy. Public administration programs might emphasize knowledge of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, bureaucratic decision-making processes. Meanwhile, Art courses might develop students’ understandings of the importance of the First Amendment in protecting artistic expression, the role of art in social and political debates, and the ways in which art can strengthen communities and address social problems. Disciplines have diverse conceptual frameworks for understanding "citizenship" and delineating civic skills.

Recognize that knowledge is dynamic, changing, socially constructed, and "implicated with power." For this reason, civic knowledge includes familiarity with key historical struggles, campaigns, and social movements, in addition to knowledge about fundamental principles and central arguments about democracy over time and the ability to describe the main civic intellectual debates within a discipline. Civic knowledge also includes an understanding that "knowledge is actionable" and that when

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5 The SMART framework is used (usually without attribution) by authors, centers, businesses, universities and others publishing in the area of learning outcomes assessment. The acronym traces back to a November 1981 issue of Management Review paper by George T. Doran called There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives.


7 See Chapter 13, “Fostering Civic Engagement through the Arts.”

8 Richard M. Battistoni, Civic Engagement across the Curriculum: A Resource Book for Service-Learning Faculty in All Disciplines. (Providence, R.I.: Campus Compact, 2002).

9 Hatcher, Assessing Civic Knowledge, 84.

individuals join together to “co-create knowledge” it empowers them to make positive changes in the world around them.\(^\text{11}\)

Alternatively, one may wish to focus on **civic skills**. Effective engagement requires a variety of skills. These include civic discourse and dialogue, \(^\text{12}\) including dialogue across difference. \(^\text{13}\) Mary Kirlin identified four major categories of civic skills: organization, communication, collective decision making and critical thinking. \(^\text{14}\) Examples include organizing and persuading others to take action, navigating the political system, consensus building toward the common good, listening to diverse perspectives, and forming positions on public issues.

A third area for assessment includes **civic identity**. The term civic identity describes the aspect of identity that leads a person to take public action to solve community problems. \(^\text{15}\) People with a strong civic identity view themselves as active participants in society and share a strong commitment to work with others to promote the public good. Numerous studies point to civic identity as an important factor inspiring civic engagement. \(^\text{16}\) A sense of civic identity, when combined with relevant knowledge and skills and motivation, explains why people engage in politics and public action. \(^\text{17}\) Civic identity includes both intellectual and ethical components (e.g. critical thinking skills and empathy for others). While these skills and dispositions may seem difficult to measure, tools are available. For example, participation in organized group during adolescence \(^\text{18}\) and during college \(^\text{19}\) contribute to formation of lifelong civic identity and engagement. Rubrics for measuring critical thinking and empathy are highlighted in *an essay* on existing assessment measures available in a separate edition of the Political Science Educator. \(^\text{20}\) My colleague J. Cherie Strachan and I present an assessment tool for measuring the degree to which student organizations develop civic skills and identity [here]. \(^\text{21}\)

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\(^\text{15}\) Another framework is to focus separately on civic knowledge, skills, values, and collective action. Caryn McTighe Musil provides a “Framework for Twenty-first Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement” in the AAC&U publication Civic Prompts [https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/CLDE/CivicPrompts.pdf](https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/CLDE/CivicPrompts.pdf).

See Table 1 (page 5) for a useful delineation of the elements of this comprehensive approach designed to foster civic knowledge, skills, values, and collective action.

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\(^\text{16}\) Consult the bibliography for more information about studies of civic identity including Colby and Damon, 1992; Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Daloz Parks, 1996; Colby and Sullivan, 2009; Knefelkamp, 2008; Youniss, McAllister, and Yates, 1997.


To return to an earlier theme, the key is to start by determining your goals. No person or program can measure everything a student learns or administer all existing civic learning assessments. An extra-curricular leadership program may wish to focus exclusively on assessing the development civic identity among students. Meanwhile, an introductory survey course might focus on assessing civic knowledge, while a 200-level civic engagement workshop might focus on assessing civic skills. Start simple. Assess. Evaluate. Revise. Repeat.

Community College Voices

Reflections on the Community College Status Committee

Sara Parker, Community College Status Committee Chair, Dean of Social Sciences, Chabot College, sparker@chabotcollege.edu

As I left the Annual American Political Science Association (APSA) Conference in Boston in September, I felt re-energized about my field and nostalgic about the conclusion of my three year term as Chair of the Committee on the Status of Community College Faculty in the Profession.

I was a participant in a National Endowment for the Humanities Program in 2011 when I had a casual conversation with one of the organizers. I shared how much I loved my job, yet felt disconnected to my discipline as a community college faculty member. I expressed frustration at the hierarchies that characterize academia and marginalize community college faculty and the practice of teaching.

She shared that through her work at APSA, she had met others who felt the same way and encouraged me to become more involved on this issue. The following year, I attended a seminar with interdisciplinary community college faculty and representatives from their respective disciplinary organizations. I learned about the concerted steps other organizations had taken to include community college faculty. For example: a Community College Task Force at the American Sociological Association, a Two Year College English Association (TYCA), and the Office of Two Year Colleges created by the American Chemical Society to specifically address the needs of community college chemistry faculty, to name a few.

In 2015, APSA released an ad hoc report that cited the dire need of the organization to follow the lead of others. They recommended the creation of a Community College Status Committee, which was subsequently established.

As the inaugural Chair of this committee, I knew our work would be challenging. Through initial conversations with committee members (most of whom had been working on these issues and involved with APSA for much longer than I had), the Executive Director, and current APSA President, we organized our ideas into four broad goals: 1) Build community among community college faculty; 2) Grow community college membership within the organization; 3) Create a more welcoming culture and professional equality among members; 4) Elevate the focus of teaching and getting best practices into classrooms.

We identified these areas of focus for our work: collecting and making available community college specific programming and resources, improving coordination with regional organizations (which are often more accessible for community college faculty), working closely with the Teaching and Learning at APSA Conference Committee and Political Science Education Section, connecting with graduate students and part-time faculty, addressing funding issues, supporting partnership work with four-year colleges, and recommending administrative and procedural changes to APSA. We also sought to raise the visibility of community college faculty throughout the organization, particularly at the annual conference.
I’m proud to say that we were able to make progress on most of the areas above. Mini conferences and panels focused on Community Colleges took place at the Western Political Science Association as well as at the Annual Conference. Our partnership with the Teaching and Learning Conference Committee helped to celebrate teaching themes. We supported the election of a Community College faculty member, Erin Richards, to the Council, and more community college faculty representatives participated on panels and were invited to serve in other areas of APSA governance.

We made recommendations that we felt would redress perceived slights such as de-coupling high school faculty and community college faculty in a membership category. A website with resources for community college faculty is close to launch. One of our most exciting successes was a national survey conducted to learn more about community college faculty experiences and interests across the United States. Analysis of the results is still underway. As political scientists know well, changing culture is a long-term endeavor. But I hope that these early successes will lay the ground work for continued progress.

One of the surprising things I learned through this experience was how little our four-year colleagues know about community colleges in general and about how the two-year faculty position differs from research-oriented and teaching focused colleges. I also confronted the APSA committee structure, where there is less than seamless transitioning of members and Chairs, lack of consistency in committee training and coordination, and in-person meetings just once a year (if members can secure funding). That said, one of the most enjoyable aspects of serving was getting to know and work with the smart and engaged APSA staff and the active membership community. Similarly, all three APSA Presidents that I worked with were genuinely attentive to and interested in elevating the participation of Community College faculty within the organization.

I’ve provided some of my reflections about the work of the Status Committee over the last few years. I anticipate more formal recommendations to be forthcoming in various publications. I would like to thank the founding members of the committee with whom I worked most closely, Elsa Dias, Erin Richards, Cammy Shay, Andrea Simpson, Tressa Tabares, as well as more recent additions, Peter Bowman, Eric Schwartz, and Nichole Shippen for their time and valuable contributions.

Finally, I want to pass along the advice I received: if you are a community college faculty member, please consider getting involved with the work of the Status Committee! You can contact Janna Deitz, Senior Director, Congressional Fellowship Program and Academic & Professional Development. She can be reached at jdeitz@apsanet.org

**Featured Essays**

**International Perspectives on American Politics: An Online Collaboration**

*Anita Chadha, Associate Professor of Political Science, Department of Social Science, University of Houston, Downtown, ChadhaA@uhd.edu*

For the past twelve years, I have involved my class in introductory American politics in Houston, TX in an online collaboration discussing current and controversial issues in American politics with several U.S. institutions and community colleges (So far these discussions have involved students from Texas, California, Wisconsin, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland).

The intent of the collaboration was for students to engage with each other on questions posed to them on a weekly basis. With the anonymity and (infinite) time afforded by online spaces, students had time to think and respond with critical thought often revisiting the discussion. Using a mixed method approach of content analysis and statistical testing, I can confirm that
students have been academically reflective, as well as challenging, arguing and questioning each other with lengthy posts and responses furthering these discussions.

Measuring academic reflectivity was based on research that defined deeper reflective learning to mean that students had reflected, deliberated, or reconsidered their own views when they responded to questions or when they commented on other students’ posts (Chadha, 2018; Woods & Baker, 2004; Yeh, 2010). Reflectivity was not just talking for the sake of talking, but coding for reflectivity meant 1) that the student was thinking critically, developing informed perspectives across issues, learning from opposing views of others and interacting in a civil manner. They puzzled through problems or issues, questioned and challenged peers holding them accountable for their views. Reflectivity, therefore, involves critically reflecting on one’s own beliefs while simultaneously being open to learning other ideas or perspectives from peers, which requires a dialogue, and a seeking out of alternative perspectives. This means that students have reconsidered their own views, challenging themselves and their peers to think critically and even corrected and clarified their stance on disagreement with their responses. In doing so, they responded with thoughtful, reflective and deliberate comments without knowing whom they interact with on an online site. This also meant that 2) students would ask each other honest questions, one that enlarged the scope of the discussions, rather than rhetorical ones that assumed answers. And that students 3) would use classroom ideas/texts, 4) media materials or outside links referencing their ideas to further these deliberations. And lastly, 5) the length of student posts and responses were measured on a scale of 1–3, where 1 = a short response of usually 75 words or fewer; 2 = a medium response; and 3 = a long response. Please note that it is not the total number of postings per student (example: student X posted six times a day, five days in a row) that is a measure toward academic reflectivity, rather, the academic reflectivity score was a measurement of thoughtful understanding and contribution to a post or response, and one that would facilitate interaction through the use of academic class text references, outside links, and media materials.

This fall (2018) the online collaboration involves my students in Houston, TX with students at Yonsei University in Korea who are enrolled in the same class type, an introductory American politics class along with the same collaboration requirements as my prior collaborations. These identical syllabus requirements are that they are to post a minimum of eight times to an instructor’s question and respond to a peer a minimum of sixteen times for a total of twenty-four posts during the semester using a minimum of 75 words. So far, the content analysis (which is ongoing) shows that their posts and responses have been reflective, deliberative, civil, lengthy (posts averaging 1500 words) with several revisiting the online collaboration without regard to gender, race or other differentials interacting with civility despite the current and controversial questions from differing perspectives.

Here is an (edited) question that was asked this fall followed by a sample of student responses. “…. Historically[,] turnout in midterm elections tends to be low. And historically one of the issues that can affect voters is how popular the president is. A wildly popular president can motivate a lot of people, particularly people of the president’s party, to turn out to vote. Also typically, during good economic times, the party of the president would do better than they would during periods of economic decline…. If Democrats end up taking back control of the House during the midterms, you could see changes in the American political landscape ahead of the next general election in 2020. Based on this what you know about midterm elections, what do you think these midterm elections can achieve in our democracy? Is turnout a concern? Are the political campaigns ahead of these elections different than in the past? How so? Many people feel that the negativity around campaigning continues to get worse each year, but is that true? Do midterm elections impart specific issues? OK, so let’s say
the Republicans or Democrats win the Senate. What does that actually mean in real terms? What will change in Washington? So, we established there are a lot of races happening. Can you name three races you find most compelling and why? What are some ballot measures in these midterm elections that can change the political climate? What is at stake...and what can midterm elections achieve/not achieve? Why? Here is a sample of student responses,

*Houston student response:*

“Midterm elections, although highly disregarded by the public, are crucial for the political stability in the country. Personally, I’ve noticed a large influx of interest in this year’s election. This is mostly due to the current president, who as most of you know, has brought extreme controversy to the office. In these midterm elections, the stakes could not be higher as a battle is being waged to decide which vision of America will prevail; that of President Donald Trump, or his opponent. Control of the US House of Representatives, Congress and the Senate is at stake. These elections are important especially for those who feel underrepresented in the presidential elections. Active participation in these elections may guarantee the voice of the representative for each state. The midterm elections taking place this year are different than those of the past simply because people have shown outrage regarding certain policies and decisions that have been happening during Trump's presidency. This outrage has in turn given rise to citizen's political efficacy. The race that I find most compelling is the one happening between democratic nominee Beto O’Rourke and his Republican opponent, Ted Cruz. Texas, being a predominantly Republican state has always washed away Democratic nominees. However, O’Rourke is trailing behind Cruz by 6 points. According to Nicole Goodkind on Newsweek, the biggest problem O’Rourke faces is that in Texas, the people that vote the most are Republicans. If O’Rourke can bridge that gap and influence more Democrats to vote then he may indeed change the face of not only Texas politics but those of the country as well.”

*Korean student response:*

“Midterm election is a 'midterm-evaluation' for the current administration and the opposition party...Turnout is one of the most critical factors that determine the efficacy of the election....Turnout is important because the result of the election with a low turnout would only contain 'half-efficacy' in their future politics. Also, it is more likely that the elected senators (under the low turnout) be criticized (or not being admitted or recognized by the public) due to the low turnout condition (because it means that they are supported by only a small portion of people). Also, turnout is an indirect measure that represents the extent of the public’s political participation and concern on politics....

There are many interesting races going on in this midterm election. I think it is interesting because each competitive race contains the critical issue of each state. For example, in races like Mimi Walters and Katie Porter in California’s 45th Congressional District (on tax bill issue in California), Barbara Comstock and Jennifer Wexton in Virginia’s 10th Congressional District (on health care issue) and Carlos Curbelo and Debbie Mucarsel-Powell in Florida’s 26th Congressional District (on immigration, carbon tax bill), its people would experience different society following their voting. Voters can limit the policy that they don’t prefer and at the same time promote certain policy based on their interest.

The midterm election has another critical implication in democracy because its result would mainly rule over the future party politics and the overall political situation of the country. And this aspect imparts specific issues especially in terms of a power struggle between the Democrats and the Republicans. For example, if Republicans maintain their control of the current Senate, the current Trump administration would likely continue its strong power on the country’s political and legal system. On the other hand, if Democrats take control of the House, they will be in a more active position to check the current administration and their policies. Based on the
result of the election, the future arbiter of Washington politics would be determined.”


**Civic Education: Information Evaluation, Political Deliberation and Critical Thinking at a Federal Courthouse**

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**Digital Era and Political Deliberations**

In recent years, it seems that the concept of public discourse is viewed as an ancient ritual practiced in the distant past. The ability to meaningfully speak and listen to one another is no longer trending and quick swipe at people who you disagree with are now in vogue. The current Administration does not encourage critical thinking, political deliberation and public discussion. This is demonstrated through President Trump’s obsessive use of Twitter to inform the public of the Administration’s political stand, communicate public policies and key political decisions.

Ott (2017) notes that short posts and political links on social media platforms cannot facilitate critical conversations and that it is impossible to deliberate political, social and economic information on social media sites. He posits that: These activities do not foster reasoned public deliberation among people of diverse backgrounds and experiences; they produce a uniformed, uncritical, and irresponsible electorate. And, let’s be honest, such activities are not really even about trying to share information; they’re self-interested performances undertaken to project a particular political image of oneself. (p.65)

Despite the limitations of social media and online platforms to deliberate information, it is worth noting that the use of internet and social media is popular among young people. According to 2018 Pew Research Center Report, approximately 95% of teenagers have access to a smartphone, and 65% say they are online ‘almost constantly’ and that 32% of teenagers report that they use Twitter. In a 2017 survey conducted between January 10 to January 22, 2017 based on 853 children age 10 to 18 in the United States, Common Sense Media reports that 49% of teenagers say that they receive news from social network platforms while 47% say they get their news from family. Although many teenagers are being exposed to political, social and economic information online - especially from social media platforms, many are not equipped with the knowledge and skills to sort and evaluate the credibility and legitimacy of their news sources.

**Civic Education: Information Evaluation, Political Deliberation and Critical Thinking**

In a digital era where there is an overabundance of information, the task of sorting and evaluating information becomes much more difficult especially for young people. How can teenagers and young adults differentiate legitimate information from fake news and articles that purposely distort information? This dilemma leads Judge Robert A. Katzmann of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit to launch a circuit-wide civic education initiative – Justice For All: Courts and the Community in 2014. The main goals of the Justice For All Initiative include fostering a positive relationship with the community we serve and increasing
public understanding of the roles and operations of the court system. Through this Initiative, the Second Circuit offers civic education programs to community members. These programs are designed with high school students and young adults in mind. One such program is legal information research where young people learn how to evaluate different websites and social media posts focusing on U.S. Amendments and court cases. During the 2017-2018 academic year, one of the civic education programs focused on the Fourth Amendment and used MacWade v. Kelly 460 F.3d 260 (2d Cir. 2006) as the central case study. This court case focused on the constitutionality of NYPD searches of large containers and backpacks that are large enough to conceal and carry explosive devices of subway passengers prior to their entering the subway transit system. The lesson starts with basic government information – the three branches of government and the checks and balances. After the explanation of the structure of the court system, students are asked if they have ever been searched by NYPD inside a NYC subway station or if they have seen NYPD search tables at a subway station. More importantly, we ask if such a search is permissible under the Fourth Amendment. In order to answer this question, we ask students to perform web searches using a search engine. Students are introduced to different research techniques to narrow down their search results. These techniques include Boolean searches: using “quotes” to search for an exact phrase; using (parenthesis) to create a more complex search results; using AND to include two or more terms; using OR to widen the search with multiple keywords; and using NOT to exclude a specific keyword from the search results.

The lesson also introduced students to the CRAAP test developed by California State University, Chico to assess the credibility of their sources. CRAAP stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose. Students are then introduced to the MacWade case for their first legal research activity. In this activity, we ask students to work in pairs and search for two resources that they think would be helpful when doing research on the prompt “Is it justifiable for police officers to set up random subway station check points in order to inspect containers large enough to conceal and carry explosive devices?” This activity encourages students to think about the scope of the Fourth Amendment and what constitutes reasonable and unreasonable searches and seizures. Students are reminded to evaluate their web resources using the CRAAP test. Then we ask students to generate a word cloud by submitting their keywords searches to us via www.polleverywhere.com. This active learning is a vital component of our civic lesson as students become active participants in the learning process (Asal, Jahanbani, Lee, & Ren, 2018; Hertel and Millis, 2002; Pettenger, West, & Young, 2014). We ask students for the rationales behind their keywords and the effectiveness of their search results. We debrief the activity by asking students to share the two online resources they selected and why. The debrief activity helps students to better understand the legitimacy and credibility of the sources they identified. We also encourage students to think about sources that may appear credible but in truth are not.

In addition to the word cloud activity, we also use polleverywhere to poll students on the constitutionality of NYPD’s searches of large containers and backpacks of subway riders prior to entering the subway transit system three different times throughout the course of the lesson. After the final poll, we facilitate a discussion on students’ positions regarding the MacWade case and deliberate on the scope of the Fourth Amendment. Students’ discussions are a vital part of our civic education as they allowed students to think critically about online information and the constitutionality of the MacWade case.

Through the Justice For All Initiative, the court hopes to demystify the judicial branch and creates a civic education program that cultivates critical thinking skills (Nussbaum, 2006) on complex political and judicial issues and nurtures the ability to deliberate information from multiple points of views (Dryzek, 2002; Enslin, Pendlebury, & Tjiattas, 2001; Levinson, 2002; Rubin and Giarelli, 2013). Political dialogues and
deliberations are important skills in a world where diverse political, social and economic ideas and perspectives exist in close proximity. We believe that critical thinking through political dialogues and deliberations have the ability to combat distorted information by arming young people with the skills to respectfully analyze and evaluate different forms of information and ideas for biases and authenticity. Political dialogues and deliberations also allow young people to exchange new ideas and to gain new perspectives on a given topic. We hope that through our civic education program and through the legal information research lesson, young people will be better equipped to evaluate information for credibility and authenticity; and that the next time they go on social media platforms they are more likely to spot fake news and are less likely to pass on false information.

References


Announcements

Archived issues of The Political Science Educator can be found here: http://community.apsanet.org/TeachingCivicEngagement/additionalteachingresources/new-item
Please send any article submissions or announcements for future newsletters to Bobbi Gentry at bgentry@bridgewater.edu. Submission deadlines are June 15 for the Summer/Fall newsletter, and December 15 for the Winter/Spring newsletter. 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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Bobbi Gentry, Newsletter Editor