# POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATOR

**A newsletter of the Political Science Education section of the American Political Science Association**

*Editors: Colin Brown (Northeastern University), Matt Evans (Northwest Arkansas Community College)*

**MESSAGE FROM THE SECTION PRESIDENT**

Dear section members:

First, I want to wish all of you a very Happy New Year as we enter 2022!  I know that I have sounded like Pollyanna in the last few newsletters, but really, this year has got to be better–and I'm saying that as the Omicron variant is spreading at a very rapid rate and we are once again beginning a semester with a lot of unknowns. I know that all of us want a return to some sort of normalcy.

It was so exciting to see so many of you in Seattle for the annual meeting. Even all masked-up, it was great to see so many faces in person. The highlight of our business meeting was the announcement of the award winners:

- The Craig T. Brians Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research & Mentoring went to Judithanne McLauchlan (University of South Florida).
- The Best APSA Conference Paper went to Christopher L. Brown, Jeannie Grussendorf, Michael Shea, and Clark DeMas, all from Georgia State University for their paper entitled, "Changing the Paradigm?  Creating an Adaptive Course to Improve Student Engagement and Outcomes in Introductory Political Science Classes."
- The Distinguished Service Award went to Juan Carlos Huerta (Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi).
- The Lifetime Achievement Award went to Michelle Deardorff (University of Tennessee-Chattanooga).

Many thanks to the award committees for their hard work in choosing the winners. The PSE section helped to co-sponsor the reception at TLC at APSA and also the reception for the book launch of *Political Science Internships:  Towards Best Practices*[1] edited by Renee Van Vechten, Bobbi Gentry, and John Berg (published by APSA).

A plethora of good things are happening with members in our section. First, John Ishiyama (University of North Texas) became the President of APSA. John has worked tirelessly for our section and it is exciting that he now leads the organization. For the annual meeting[2] to be held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, September 15-18, 2022, John has chosen the theme of "Rethink, Restructure, and Reconnect:  Towards A Post-Pandemic Political Science."  Certainly, this pandemic has forced all of us to rethink how we do what we do. Juan Carlos Huerta (Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi) was also installed as a Vice-President on the APSA Council and Mary McHugh (Merrimack College) was elected to serve on APSA Council. Michael Rogers (Arkansas Tech University) is serving on the APSA Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights, and Freedoms, serving as co-chairs of TLC@APSA in Montreal are Julio Carrion (University of Delaware) and Allison Rank (SUNY-Oswego). In 2023, we will resume our TLC stand alone

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[1] https://web.apsanet.org/teachingcivicengagement/political-science-educator/
[2] https://connect.apsanet.org/apsa2022/

conference at a location still to be decided. Program chairs for the PSE section at the conference are Bobbi Gentry (Bridgewater College) and Laura Roost (Newberry College). Please let us know if you are serving APSA in any capacity so you can be recognized!

Michelle Allendoerfer, Director of Teaching and Learning, for APSA along with Bennett Grubbs have a full schedule beginning this Spring. There are five teaching & learning symposia planned so far in 2022:  American Politics (March); Race, Ethnicity and Politics (April); Social and Economic Inequality (Summer); Community College (Summer); and Global Politics (Fall). They continue to offer resources on the APSA Educate web site[3], so check them out!  Mary McHugh and I are serving on the APSA Teaching & Learning Policy Committee. If you have any suggestions or ideas, please send them to either of us.

Beginning this summer, the *Journal of Political Science Education*[4] will have a new editorial team. Editor-in-Chief is Charity Butcher (Kennesaw State University); Lead Editor is Alasdair Blair (De Montfort University); and Associate Editors are Tavishi Bhasin, Elizabeth Gordon and Mala Carter Hallward (all of Kennesaw State University), Alison Rios Millett McCartney (Towson University), and Simon Usherwood (Open University.)  Congratulations to this new team!

We also want to thank the current editorial team who has done an outstanding job!  Currently serving are Editor-in-Chief Victor Asal (University at Albany) and Section Editors for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Mitchell Brown (Auburn University) and Shane Nordyke (University of South Dakota); for Political Science Instruction: Joseph W. Roberts (Roger Williams University); for Reflections on Teaching and the Academy: Mark Johnson (Minnesota State Community and Technical College), and for Book, Teaching Tools, and Educational Resources: J. Cherie Strachan (Virginia Commonwealth University).

I want to thank all that are serving on the Political Science Education section council:  Vice-Chair/Secretary Michael Rogers (Arkansas Tech University), Joseph Roberts (Treasurer), Colin Brown (Northeastern University), Megan Becker (University of Southern California), Rachel Bzostek Walker (Collin College), Maureen Feeley (University of California-San Diego), Mark Carl Romm (Georgetown University), J. Cherie Strachan (Virginia Commonwealth University), and Patrick McKinlay as Immediate Past President (Morningside College.)  Simply put: this is the best group of people ever to work with!  Finally, we welcome Colin Brown (Northeastern University) and Matt Evans (Northwest Arkansas Community College) as newsletter co-editors. All of us welcome your feedback and suggestions.

<div align="right">
Very best,<br>
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[3] https://educate.apsanet.org/
[4] https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/upse20/current

## The Teacher-Scholar

## THE JANUARY 6TH INSURRECTION AND THE CIVIC EDUCATION IMPERATIVE

*By Elizabeth A. Bennion (Indiana University South Bend, ebennion@iusb.edu)*

On Jan. 6, 2021, rioters attacked the United States Capitol in an attempt to stop the certification of the 2020 presidential election and disrupt the peaceful transfer of power. At least seven people died, dozens more were injured, and hundreds of works in the Capital were defaced. Millions watched live as attackers equipped with zip ties and bear spray pushed through barricades, smashed windows, and called for the death of elected officials. Gallows outside the capital and pipe bombs near the headquarters of the Democratic and Republican National Committees made it clear that these events fell outside the criteria for a peaceful protest that symbolizes an active citizenry in a free nation.

For many political observers, the attack on the capital was a manifestation of an increasingly fractured and partisan Congress and nation, as well as a warning sign that U.S. democracy is in danger. The events of January 6th did not happen in a vacuum. The rise of violent extremism and support for anti-democratic symbols, actions, and leaders has grown in recent years in the U.S. and abroad. At the same time, negative partisanship turns people who do not share one's partisan affiliation or ideological beliefs into personal enemies – and enemies of the state. The fallacies of confirmation bias and appeal to authority led millions of supporters to believe, without evidence, that the election was stolen from Donald Trump – just one of several conspiracy theories now embraced by Americans who distrust political institutions, the media, and their fellow Americans.

Until that day, violent attacks targeting powerful symbols of America were generally seen as a threat from beyond the country's borders. This threat to safety, security, and democratic institutions came from fellow Americans. Unlike previous threats that arose from fringe groups or rogue individuals, those arrested on January 6th were often part of society's mainstream. They were teachers, CEOs, veterans, doctors, and lawyers. Rampant electoral disinformation,[5] high levels of distrust in the election system,[6] and increased support for political violence[7] make another January 6th an all-too-likely possibility.

As democratic norms in the U.S. deteriorate amidst a national and global trend toward democratic backsliding, civic educators must consider how we can be part of the solution – defending democracy by strengthening support for democratic institutions and giving students

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[5]https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/09/21/disinformation-may-be-the-new-normal-election-officials-fear

[6]https://www.npr.org/2021/11/01/1050291610/most-americans-trust-elections-are-fair-but-sharp-divides-exist-a-new-poll-finds

[7]https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-rise-of-political-violence-in-the-united-states/

the skills they need to engage in productive civic discourse. Americans from all demographic and ideological backgrounds who value self-governance need to work together to protect democratic institutions and forge a more perfect union.

Training educators to facilitate political discussions in a productive, civil, and inclusive manner is vital to the future of our nation. In a *Political Science Educator* essay I co-authored with MPA students Kayla Isenbletter and David Hurley. We review some best practices for facilitating civic dialogue while cultivating civic discourse that evolves with political reality. This includes exposing students to differing views, developing students' communication skills, and guiding students through fact-checking processes and the development of thoroughly researched positions and collective policy solutions.

Teaching students how to work productively toward policy goals involving political compromise is another way that educators can address the threat to U.S. democracy. Simulations are a powerful way to give students hands-on, experiential learning that develops their understanding of the policy making process, including the competing pressures that policymakers face when passing legislation. This newsletter includes a second essay I co-authored with Hurley and Isenbletter highlighting the important ways political scientists use simulations to develop student capacity for productive civic and political engagement. Grounding the simulations in personal interactions between diverse students, political decision makers, and the people who are most directly affected by specific policies enriches student understanding of the diversity of human perspectives and experiences, as well as the importance of public policy, political compromise, and political engagement. It is inevitable that people will get frustrated with their lives, politics, and the direction of the nation. As educators it is our job to draw upon our skills as teachers and scholars to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experience to investigate political problems thoroughly using reputable sources and data, and to work within – and peacefully reform – democratic institutions while seeking collaborative, evidence-based, inclusive solutions.

# USING ONLINE ANONYMOUS PARTICIPATION TECHNOLOGY TO ENCOURAGE UNDERGRADUATE COURSE ENGAGEMENT

*By Mark Benton (University of Missouri, mbenton@mail.missouri.edu) and Elizabeth Dorssom (University of Missouri, elizabeth.dorssom@mail.missouri.edu)*

Facilitating class engagement for undergraduate students can be difficult. Undergraduates may be less inclined to engage in class discussions for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, nervousness to engage and the feeling that their opinions are not as well-developed as their peers (Aguillon et. al 2020; Bergquist & Philips 1975; Crawford & McCloud 1990; Lee & McCabe 2021). As first-time graduate student instructors co-teaching a hyflex 50-person general prerequisite American Government class in Missouri during the fall of 2020, we were aware of the struggles of getting undergraduate students to engage in class discussions due to our experiences as teaching assistants. Therefore, we knew at the beginning of our Introduction to American Government class that we needed a way to encourage more student participation in classroom discussions.

The solution we came up with was using Padlet[8], which is a digital notice board that allows students to respond to discussion questions anonymously. We were first introduced to Padlet while taking a workshop on discussing difficult topics with undergraduate students. The workshop instructor allowed us to anonymously answer her discussion questions via Padlet. Upon completing this workshop, we realized this feature might make Padlet the solution for our online discussion issues.

Padlet has a variety of designs available, but the general format remains the same. The instructor posts a discussion question on the board and then provides the link to the Padlet to the class either in a Zoom chat or email. Students can respond in real time and the instructor can read the comments aloud. We shared the Padlet on the screen so each student could read the comments, even if they were not accessing the Padlet link.

When facilitating discussions in our Introduction to American Government class, we would encourage students to either speak their opinions verbally or use the Padlet to make their opinions known as well. We would read the comments entered on Padlet aloud and made sure to mention that each of the comments on Padlet were just as good as those made orally in class. Student Padlet responses remained anonymous to other students and ourselves.

After the course was over, we reached out to students for interviews on their thoughts about anonymous engagement through Padlet. Five students agreed to interviews, which were conducted virtually over Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. We read transcripts to understand how anonymity facilitated class engagement. When we report responses, they are edited for

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[8]https://padlet.com/

the sake of readability and brevity, with ellipses representing omitted content. We aim to substantially preserve our participants' voices. Interviews were between twenty and twenty five minutes.

Students revealed that self-doubt led to a fear of judgment in a way that could hinder engagement but that could be addressed through anonymity. Anonymity removes the link between students' thoughts and their identities, which makes it impossible to judge an individual for their response. Anonymous online engagement helped students feel more comfortable engaging in class by making them unidentifiable to those who would judge them. Free of the fear of others' judgements, students became more comfortable engaging. One student reported:

> J.D.: "Just the fact that If I were wrong...I just have this huge fear of embarrassment whenever I am wrong in front of like, 20 people that I don't know. Because I feel like I'm supposed to be smart. All these people are smart, I don't want to look stupid....Professors, they're like willing to work with you and help you and guide you to the right answer. But your peers, I know what it's like to be 'what did you just say? What type of answer are you talking about?'"

When respondents feared being judged for engagement, it usually was because of a fear of peers' judgements rather than instructors'. The participatory challenges rising from a fear of others' judgements in a lower-level American Government class may be especially pronounced during a presidential election year. The contentious 2020 presidential campaign and election took place during our course with political discourse covering topics including fraudulent claims about election insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccinations, and the Supreme Court. One student noted how the political environment and fear of peer judgment could create barriers to engagement:

> C.D: "I tend to answer things a lot and participate in discussions. There's not a lot of things that could be asked that I wouldn't answer. The one thing in my class I wouldn't want to answer was in my public speaking class...was in terms of vaccines and I just didn't know the people around me. So I didn't really want to answer that in case that would, like, make someone not like me for something that may not be a huge part of my philosophy. But I think besides that, maybe just like controversial stuff in that environment is the only thing I can think of that wouldn't make me want to participate..."
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> Interviewer: So you're not necessarily worried about if you get something wrong in front of the professor?

> C.D.: "Not really. I think a lot of times for me, at least whenever I get stuff wrong, I'm usually answering that question because I think it's right. So it's the biggest opportunity for impactful learning. if I think something is right and I find out it's wrong I can be corrected."

Students generally reported little fear of consequences from their instructors for being incorrect in class. At the same time, students could be hesitant to participate because of self-doubt in themselves and fear that their answers could invite judgment from their peers. Fear of judgment is especially salient for controversial topics. Students also reported that anonymous engagement could help them engage while having marginalized identities:

> K.S.: "I'm in sociology this semester and we submit anonymous questions and the professor answers. It's enjoyable to just answer this random person's question that you have no clue…who posted it and you don't necessarily get to take like gender or their maybe ethnicity into stance…you don't know what background they come from...I went to an all girls school in high school and I had originally gone to a co-ed grade school so I had been in a class setting with boys. I never really necessarily knew what it looked like without them or how they impacted my studies until I got to the all girls school and we did begin talking about topics that were maybe deeper in society…I would never stand there and like fight for what I wanted because when you did the boys would make fun of you and be 'like oh you're wrong, you don't know what you're talking about' and I didn't realize the impact it had on me until I went to high school…if women answer too aggressively they come off as very prudish or or almost bitchy in a sense."

Anonymous online engagement could potentially create a more equitable course. Women often participate less in voluntary classroom interactions in a way connected to their gender identity (Aguillon et. al 2020; Lee & McCabe 2021). These responses indicate that one barrier to engagement could be fear of judgment from peers while participating in class as a marginalized person. K.S. points out that women can hang back from class discussion because of the gendered expectations of others. Anonymity could make students with these identities more comfortable because they might worry that their response might not meet ascribed expectations.

Overall, our research indicated that students' engagement in the class might be hindered by self-doubt that creates a fear of judgment from students' peers. By disconnecting responses from identity, students can feel more comfortable engaging in class, especially with contentious content or in spaces where directly encouraging the participation of marginalized people could be inappropriate. Anonymous online engagement can help students overcome their self-doubt and engage in class discussion.

**References**

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**EXPLAINING OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES**

*By Josh Franco (Cuyamaca College, josue.franco@gcccd.edu)*

As instructors at community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and universities, and governmental or corporate training programs, we are all familiar with books, textbooks, workbooks, journal articles, lecture slides, assignments, activity sheets, and simulations.

Some of us are authors, co-authors, editors, and anonymous reviewers of these educational resources. These resources, and the efforts that led to their creation, contribute to growing our information, knowledge, and wisdom of the individuals, communities, and societies in the past, present, and future.

Most of these educational resources cost money to purchase, rent, or get through a paywall. However, since 2001,[9] Creative Commons has supported authors of educational resources to freely, and openly, license and distribute their work. While the emphasis may be on "free" in the sense of saving students money, I want to also discuss the notion of a resource being "open" in my explanation of Open Educational Resources (OER).

**Open Educational Resources**

According to Creative Commons,[10] OERs "are teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities." What makes an OER "open" are the 5Rs.

The 5Rs include reuse, retain, revise, remix, and redistribute. Creative Commons defines these activities in the following way:

- Retain – make, own, and control a copy of the resource.

- Reuse – use your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource publicly.

- Revise – edit, adapt, and modify your copy of the resource.

- Remix – combine your original or revised copy of the resource with other existing material to create something new.

- Redistribute – share copies of your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource with others.

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[9]https://creativecommons.org/2021/12/19/a-message-from-our-ceo-to-the-cc-community-on-creative-commons-20th-anniversary/

[10]https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/education-oer/

To facilitate the 5Rs, Creative Commons allows authors to choose among [six different license types](#)[11] for their works.

Four of these licenses (i.e. CC BY, CC BY-SA, CC BY-NC, or CC BY-NC-SA) are considered "open" because the resource that can be edited. Resources licensed CC-BY-ND and CC BY-NC-ND are not considered "open" because they cannot be edited, but can be included in a CC-collection, such as a course reader.

**Making OERs**

These resources include revising existing resources, remixing two or more resources, and creating new resources.

**Making OERs: Revising Existing Resources**

Revising existing resources means you revise an existing CC resource to include new content that you are contributing to the existing resource.

For example, say you want to revise [Introduction to Political Science Research Methods: An Open Education Resource Textbook](#)[12] to include a chapter on doing a literature review. You can download the PDF, make a copy of it, revise the copy to add your chapter between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, and publish the revised *Introduction to Political Science Research Methods* textbook with the chapter you added.

It is important to note that any CC-licensed resource that is Non-Derivative (ND) cannot be revised in any way. Only the following CC licensed materials can be revised:

- CC0
- CC BY
- CC BY-SA
- CC BY-NC
- CC BY-NC-SA

Any resource licensed CC-BY-ND and CC BY-NC-ND is not "open" because they cannot be edited. However, the whole resource can be included in a CC-collection, such as a course reader.

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[11]https://creativecommons.org/about/cclicenses/
[12]https://ipsrm.com/

### Making OERs: Remixing Two or More Resources

Remixing two or more resources means you are melding two existing resources together or augmenting an existing resource with a newly created resource.

### Making OERs: *Remixing CC0, CC BY, CC BY-SA, CC BY-NC, CC BY-NC-SA*

For example, say you want to revise [Introduction to Political Science Research Methods: An Open Education Resource Textbook](#)[13] (that contains a CC BY-NC license) with an existing OER textbook that goes into greater detail about writing research papers in political science.

You can download the PDF of both textbooks, make copies of them, mix and match the chapters based on your logical ordering and understanding of the topic as you like, and then publish the remixed textbook that includes chapters from both of the existing OER textbooks. The remixed textbook that you published is now a derivative OER that you generated.

### Making OERs: *Curating CC0, CC BY, CC BY-SA, CC BY-NC, CC BY-NC-SA with CC BY-ND or CC BY-NC-ND*

Remixing can also be known as curating, a process of combining two or more existing resources together.

For example, if you have 10 CC-licensed, peer-reviewed journal articles that you like to put together in a single course reader, you can do that whether or not they have an ND license because you are bringing together different licensed resources together to create a new object.

Bringing together differently CC licensed resources is not revising the underlying resource. You can combine ND and non-ND resources together into a single CC licensed course reader.

### Making OERs: Creating New Resources

Creating new resources means you are generating a resource that does not exist and is not a derivative of a resource that already exists. Creating resources is one of the most time-consuming processes when making OER. The challenges include having the time needed to develop an idea for a resource, assembling a team to help develop the resource to having a template for a textbook, generating a list of potential chapter quiz questions, and compiling an accessible textbook or course material.

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[13]https://ipsrm.com/

**Interested in Learning More about OERs?**

The resources below can help get you started:

- [APSA Educate (apsanet.org)](#)[14]: growing repository of CC-licensed teaching materials.

- [OPoliSci.com – Open Educational Resources and practices for political science faculty and students](#)[15]

- [OERI Webinars and Events - ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative (asccc-oeri.org)](#)[16]

Also, feel free to reach out to me by email and I'd be happy to chat with you about getting started with OERs.

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[14]https://educate.apsanet.org/
[15]https://www.opolisci.com/
[16]https://asccc-oeri.org/webinars-and-events/

**THINKTANK.EDU: A POSITIVE OUTGROWTH DURING THE PANDEMIC FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOLARS**

*By Paige Johnson Tan (Radford University, [etan3@radford.edu](mailto:etan3@radford.edu))*

In graduate school one time, I drove up from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville with my faculty mentor to a Washington, DC think tank for an event on China. We were slowed by traffic, struggled to find parking, arrived a little late, and still had a grand time. The logistics made that a once-in-a-grad-school happening. Since the pandemic, however, from my perch in Southwest Virginia at Radford University, I can attend Washington, DC think tank events every week.

Through the pandemic, faculty have shared with each other their travails: fears of getting sick, student disengagement, and online tools that just won't do what you want them to. As things evolved, we also shared those things that were positive for our teaching that we gained during the pandemic: better skill at fostering engagement online; new tools like Jamboard; synergies from mixing in-person and online, synchronous and asynchronous.

One thing I haven't heard mentioned in the pandemic-plus category is virtual think tank events. For those in political science, international affairs, and almost any policy area, the conversion of those elite Washington, DC talk-fests into free sessions available to anyone with a web connection has been pretty revolutionary.

I still remember my first time signing up for a think tank web event last summer. I looked around the webpage and didn't see a cost. I clicked through, filled in my information to register, and still expected an unaffordable charge to show up, but it never did. I eventually signed up for notifications of events at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Atlantic Council, the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, and Chatham House, among others. I found sessions at government-affiliated bodies like the US Institute of Peace and non-profits like Freedom House, as well as publishers like the Economist, Foreign Policy, and Columbia University Press too. As of now, I've found so many free events, I could easily fill most days in a week with one interesting seminar or another. As a curious person, this opportunity almost feels like it's created an addiction.

The most obvious use for these think tank events is in our own professional development as scholars. My university, Radford, provides funds for about one in-person conference a year. The constant skills upgrade and timely connection with the best academics and practitioners in my subject areas through what I call "ThinkTank.edu" plugs an important gap for me. In one week, I can learn about the future of the Army, Sino-Russian relations, China's soft-power projection in Africa, leadership in Eastern Africa, and the future of the Russian opposition.

I use what I learn in ThinkTank.edu events to upgrade my classes constantly. I have a favorite class on dictatorships. But I started from an Asia background. ThinkTank.edu events have helped me to bolster my class content on Russia, the Middle East, and Africa.

To this point, I haven't shown a think tank event in class. I have started to offer the students extra-credit opportunities for attending suitable ThinkTank.edu events and writing one-to-two page reaction papers. For my most advanced students, I believe this opportunity can help them widen their horizons and see learning and career possibilities beyond our Appalachian region. Many aspire to join the foreign policy, intelligence, and defense communities, and ThinkTank.edu is one way to show them officials and former officials in action doing what they—and my best students—love.

On a personal level, I wonder if the regular think tank events I have been attending helped me to continue to feel interested, stimulated, and connected through the pandemic. I was continuously listening in on smart people having smart conversations and didn't feel the absence of "normal life" as much as others seemed to. But I was pretty introverted to start with, so perhaps listening in on conversations was as social as I ever really wanted to be.

I would be remiss in talking about think tank events if I failed to mention their little sibling, the think tank podcast. Some existed before the pandemic (like Center for Strategic and International Studies' China Power Project). Some just got their start in 2020 (like Pekingology, also from CSIS). But they do have some of the same benefits of ThinkTank.edu more broadly: high quality practitioners and academics speaking on timely issues in domestic and global affairs. I have used ThinkTank.edu podcasts in my teaching, assigning Council on Foreign Relations' The President's Inbox as a weekly required listen in my US Foreign Policy class. I also frequently add podcast episodes to my syllabus as recommended listening for those who want to know more on a given topic.

Some think tank events were online before the pandemic. They were often ponderous, unedited, and too long. When the pandemic hit, like employers all over the world, the think tanks had to figure out how to keep things humming. The online event that emerged from the pandemic is virtual, a manageable chunk of time (usually an hour), and most always free. It helps us plug into the latest thinking in our subject areas to enhance our teaching and scholarship. If you haven't done so already, tune in to ThinkTank.edu.

**SIMULATIONS IN AN ALIEN ENVIRONMENT OF COVID-19: THE ROLE PRACTICE TEST PLAY IN PREPARING FOR THE REAL EXAM**

*By John A. Tures (LaGrange College, jtures@lagrange.edu)*

Simulations have been frequently mocked in the popular media as a poor substitute for the real thing. But practice tests may provide the ability for students to properly prepare for the real exam. In this article, I examine evidence from several classes of mine, which test whether such exam simulations help students on actual tests, what percentage of students show improvement, and whether those who take practice tests outperform those who choose not to try them. I conclude with ideas about how best to use simulated tests in an online format, beyond the pandemic era.

**Introduction: Aliens Movie & "Simulated" Jumps**

In the 1980s movie "Aliens," female protagonist Ellen Ripley asks the by-the-books young officer Gorman "How many drops is this for you, Lieutenant?" In the middle of a rapid descent onto a hostile planet, Gorman replies "Thirty-eight...simulated." Tough space marine Vasquez snaps "How many 'combat' drops?" Gorman answers "Uh, two....including this one." The others in the platoon react with dread at this admission of inexperience.

Flying from a mother ship to a relatively barren planet in a hostile environment may sound "Alien" to most educators. But so too was the environment of COVID-19 and the need for an overnight transition from in-person instruction and printed exams to a virtual world. I thankfully had taught summer online classes for several years. I knew what Zoom was (having utilized the technology for interviews for articles), and knew how to employ challenging open-book essay-based exams.

Providing online tests in a multiple-choice format that could be graded was another matter. Distributing practice exams in a way that could generate quantitative results was out of the question, as I simply struggled to simply provide multiple choice questions for our college's LMS system. I did attempt to utilize a "Kahoot" system, yet found myself with low involvement in online practice tests (40% participation). I also had a great difficulty in generating data that would enable me to see what was working, as students would sign in under unfamiliar usernames.

Help from a math professor who also knew more about the virtual environment assisted me in completing the Spring 2020 semester with online exams that students could take, and prepared me for the Fall 2020 semester, ready to use our campus LMS system. Moreover, I learned from the Spring 2020 term that unlike other practice exams I had experimented with, data could be downloaded into a usable format. But would students adopt the simulation? Would it help them in their grades for the real online tests?

**Putting Online Practice Exams Into Practice**

I administered seven exams overall to three of my 2020 classes: government, political economy and law. The class average on the practice tests was 57.81 while it was 82.8957 on the seven actual exams, an improvement of 25.087 points (the t-statistic was 6.58, with a p-value that was significant at the .0001 level).



Figure 1: Percentage Of Class Students Improving From Practice Tests To Actual Exams
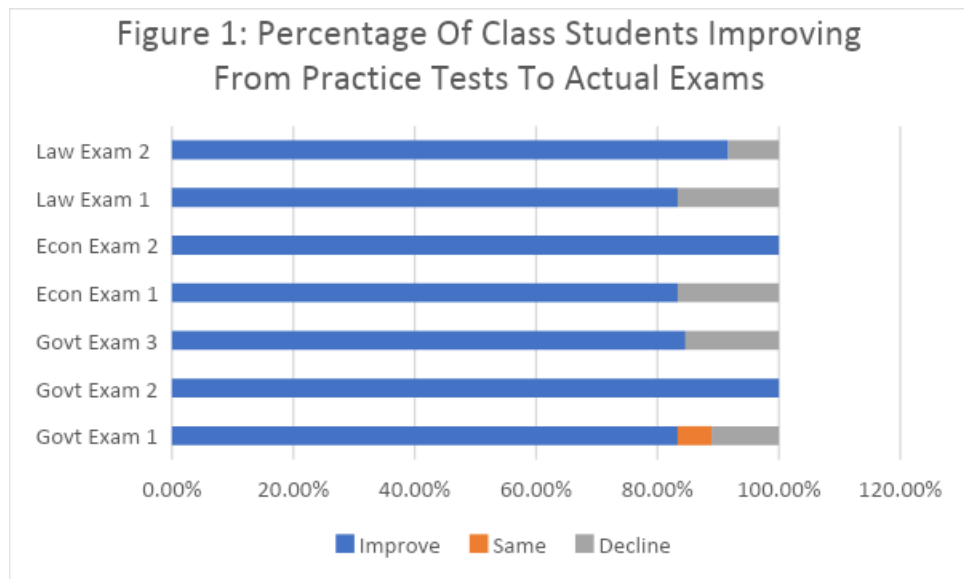
This was not just a matter of only a few students showing improvement, as you can see in Figure 1. More than 80 percent of the class recorded better grades on the actual test, over the simulated exam, while the rest maintained the same level or declined in their test scores. One of the decliners was a student who got a perfect score on the practice test, and dropped only a few points on the actual exam, still receiving an "A."

Figure 2: Government Exams
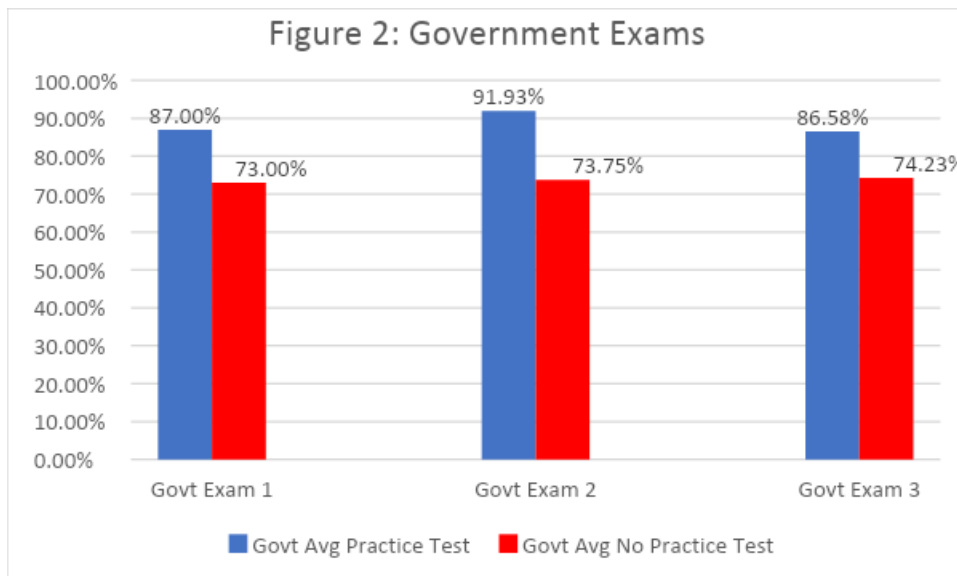
Not all students opted to take the practice test in my government class, a course filled with both majors and non-majors. I was able to examine the performance on the exam between those who had taken a practice test, and those who had not. The class average on the actual exam was 88.5% for those who took a practice test beforehand, and only 73.66% for those on the actual exam who chose to skip the simulation, a gap of nearly 15 percentage points, as you can see in Figure 2. A t-test produced a t-value of 8.46, significant at the .001 level. Granted, it was for a small sample size, since my political economy and law classes, full of experienced political science majors, know to take the practice tests, from experience, to do better on the actual test.

**Lessons For Examinations Beyond The Pandemic Era**

During the 2021 academic year, I continued the process, even as campus restrictions began to loosen a bit, for several reasons. I have employed practice exams in my courses since I was a graduate student instructor, even while teaching in other countries. But I found that online exams provide several advantages that transcend even offsetting the concerns about the coronavirus crisis and the need to go virtual.

First, online exams demonstrated themselves to be a useful tool in student instruction. Those taking the class outperformed their counterparts on the real exams if they had taken a simulated test, and often by several points. Sometimes, the students tried the exam multiple times to improve their scores, without even a suggestion from me to do so. By the end of the semester, fewer and fewer students eschewed the practice quiz; in some classes, every student took the practice test.

Second, such virtual simulations, when done through an LMS, provide the instructor plenty of information. Long bBefore COVID-19, I had been giving printed out practice tests to students. But these were printed out. I would read out the answer key, or email it to students, so they could study from it. Now, thanks to our LMS, I was able to gather data on which students were taking the practice exam, and who weren't. I could see how students were doing, which questions they were getting right and wrong, and how they were improving.

Third, I noticed that students were not just showing improvement on other exams. Every year, our political science senior seminar students would take a nationally-normed exam. They used to perform below average on these tests, compared to our other college seniors and their peer group of other universities. But since we started getting practice exams to students, they've shown an ability to learn how to prepare better for such exams. They now perform much better in comparison to their fellow seniors, in our college or other similar schools.

There are some tips I would offer for instructors willing to employ these methods in their class, in-person and virtual. First of all, let students take the practice exam several times, so they can get used to preparing for the actual test better. Second, prepare to check on the practice test results before you give out the real deal, so you can be ready to help those who need it, based upon their performance. Third, gather the data so you can run such analyses, to see if your students are doing better on the practice and actual exams, the percentage of the class showing improvement, and whether those who take the practice test do better on the actual exam than those who choose not to do the practice test. It lets students. Showing this data to students lets them see the statistical value of these preparations. Finally, make sure you write the practice exam early enough so the students have time to utilize it before the real exam is given out.

Though virtual simulations were mocked in the "Aliens" movie, my research has shown that they can play a valuable role in a student's education. They'll never replace the real thing, but practice can make your pupils pretty good, ready for the non-virtual experience.

# CULTIVATING CIVIL POLITICAL DISCOURSE FOR OUR DEMOCRATIC FUTURES

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Exposure to political beliefs different from one's own is vital to maintaining a "well-functioning democracy" (Caughell, 2018; see also Arendt, 1968; Aristotle, 1998; Habermas, 1989; Mill, 1956). However, simple exposure is not enough to build healthy, cooperative, and productive discourse; rather, individuals must engage with these beliefs through debate, research, and an intent to compromise for achieving political goals (Caughell, 2018, p. 660). This essay draws upon a review of articles on cultivating civic discourse[17] appearing in *PS: Political Science & Politics* over the past decade (Hurley, Isenbletter, and Bennion, 2021) to provide pedagogical techniques to help educators teach students how to engage in 'civil' civic discourse and move beyond point-scoring and adversarial debate. These approaches teach active listening, cooperative solutions, and problem-solving rather than teaching how to "win" an argument. Given the current state of political discourse, we argue that emphasizing such skills is critical to preserving democratic governance.

Rinfret (2019) describes a semester-long debate series on popular political issues where students use peer-reviewed research to defend their positions (p. 528). This debate panel offers a form of experiential learning that models the value of healthy discussion, research, and cooperative problem-solving. Students work in groups to research a debate topic. Using peer-reviewed resources, they create an outline in preparation for discussion. The debate panels consist of four students, with teams of two defending their solution to the assigned issue. Non-participating students comprise the audience and submit questions as their means of participation. The instructor acts as a moderator, posing these questions during Q+A. After Q+A, the instructor leads a discussion among the audience where students repeat the facts presented and brainstorm solutions that incorporate ideas and values from multiple perspectives. Finally, the audience votes on which panel team presented a more persuasive argument. (p. 528-530).

As Rinfret acknowledges, debates are an oft-contested mode of political learning for the precise reasoning she chooses to employ them in her classroom. As they are structured, debates force the participants to take one of two potentially reductive positions on an issue: for or against the proposed solution. These dichotomous remedies advocated by the debate teams do not always offer the best solutions; however, the audience offers a perspective that incorporates solutions with elements from both "sides." Rinfret suggests that class debates accompanied by research and deliberation encourage students to pursue compromise and collaboration to find solutions

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[17]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357661381_Civic_Engagement_Scholarship_What_We_Can_Learn_from_the_Research

that benefit all stakeholders. A post-project survey shows that debate panels increase openness to 'active listening' and 'comfort with discussion' in over half of participating students, make them more aware of the policy making process, and encourage compromise—all essential to the development of healthy and productive political discourse (p.529-530).

Leslie Caughell (2018) proposes an alternative way to engage students in contentious political topics while building empathy and discussion skills necessary to participate in all facets of civil discourse. Caughell seeks to promote political empathy by requiring students to research and market opposing political beliefs through a campaign website (p. 660). Caughell assigns each self-identified liberal student a 2016 Republican Presidential candidate. Students research their candidate's background and policy positions and make a WordPress campaign website that reflects these values and markets them to the public. Caughell assigns readings on the psychology behind political marketing and voter decision-making and expects students to use these learnings to inform content and design decisions. Caughell provides a brief introduction to WordPress mechanics but encourages students to learn more about web design, the platform, and their candidate. The project is followed by a paper defending content and design choices citing principles from the assigned readings (p. 660-661).

Caughell finds that marketing the political beliefs of candidates in an opposing political party fosters students' empathy for those aligned with these candidates while developing useful professional skills. Through pre- and post-test surveys, students show increased favorable attitudes toward their candidates, and they express more confidence in their ability to secure a nomination and their competency to implement their party platform. While some students' perceptions of each candidate become less favorable throughout the semester, the student tasked with creating that candidate's website almost always has a more favorable perception in the post-survey. Furthermore, students display increased confidence and competency with the WordPress medium, a skill many eventually include in resumes. Such assignments require students to put themselves in the mindset of differing political positions and acknowledge these positions may have merit. This is key to increasing empathy and productive political discourse (p. 661-662).

Face-to-face communication skills are essential to civil discourse; however, the increasing reliance on digital media for research, discussion, and political decision-making necessitates incorporating the digital sphere into political conversations. Jennie Sweet-Cushman addresses this need in "Social Media Learning as a Pedagogical Tool: Twitter and Engagement in Civic Dialogue and Public Policy" (2019). She develops a media literacy and political engagement education framework using Twitter as a Personal Learning Environment (PLE). Students create a list of political stakeholders to "follow" that will help them learn about current political issues. A core element of this experiment is the Class on Twitter model, in which the instructor leads the class through a Twitter comment thread discussing a political issue based on an assigned reading. Students share reliable sources on the topic to substantiate their positions, then reflect on their experiences in a blog post (p. 764-765).

While Caughell demonstrates the benefits of technology and social media on political empathy, Sweet-Cushman expands this idea by suggesting that it is the quality rather than quantity of online political engagement that determines both the degree of learning and engagement with multiple political positions that differ from one's own. Students are chronically online, exposed to political messaging daily, especially during contentious election cycles. Exposure does not guarantee increased empathy or understanding; students must be given the tools to critically examine political claims, determine their validity, and understand underlying motives. Increased emphasis on such engagement may reduce toxic political interactions online and lead to a more informed and empathetic citizenry. Through pre-test and post-test surveys, Sweet-Cushman finds that students gain competency in finding reliable political information online and summarizing key points in online discussions. They do not rely solely on their political predispositions that the instructor asked students to reveal early in the course, and a Twitter poll constructed by Sweet-Cushman finds that many students develop opinions inconsistent with self-reported party affiliation. The one-time "Class on Twitter" discussion results in conversations between students that extend beyond allotted time and engages students that do not normally participate in class (p. 766-769).

Caughell, Sweet-Cushman, and Rinfret provide valuable tools to increase political empathy and lead civil discussion. However, the current state of political discourse forces us to consider their limitations and address the reality of ever-increasing polarization. With the rise in extreme politics, should educators encourage students to empathize with these positions? Nancy Thomas (2019) poses several questions for instructors wrestling with such issues. She challenges educators to reflect on how they conduct political discourse in the classroom. For example, instructors must determine how classroom political discourse should accommodate 'feelings,' beliefs that defy evidence, and statements that defy institutional values (e.g. diversity, equity, and inclusion) that are promoted by the university. How should instructors address the fact that calls for "civility" are sometimes used to shut down dissent, ignore critical social issues, or silence the powerless? These practices set an invaluable foundation for civic discourse, including helping students build trust and community, establishing ground rules for discussion in a democratic manner, and encouraging thoughtful inquiry and shared responsibility. Educators should be hesitant to censor speech or political views, but should also not allow hateful or harmful rhetoric to derail what would otherwise be a productive discussion (p. 1-11).

Teaching students to engage in productive civic discourse is essential to cultivate a citizenry capable of cooperatively identifying and working toward solutions. Best practices and new methods must evolve with political reality. As a 2019 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*[18] noted, Professors nationwide seek ways to help students understand and communicate with people who think differently (McMurtrie, 2019). But exposure to different

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[18]https://www.chronicle.com/article/these-professors-help-students-see-why-others-think-differently/?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in

views is not sufficient. Educators must teach a broader set of skills, such as fact-checking, critically researching multiple perspectives, and the ability to verbally communicate with those holding differing views. Fortunately, resources abound to help educators meet this challenge.[19] Educators need to be intentional in deciding how to encourage healthy disagreement without alienating students or stifling discourse. Students will face political debates and disagreements their entire lives. This requires that they learn skills to discuss differences and work toward collaboration and compromise if we are to realize our aspiration for a more civil political environment.

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[19]The Institute for Democracy in Higher Education (idhe.tufts.edu), the National Institute for Civil Discourse (nicd.arizona.edu), and the National Issues Forum (nifi.org) are a few of the organizations that instructors can consult for research and guides on this topic.

# USING SIMULATIONS TO PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING ABOUT LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

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Simulations can be among the most helpful active learning activities to enhance the teaching of political science. In our review of civic engagement literature[20] published in *PS: Political Science & Politics* for the decade from 2010 to 2020, we found several innovative uses of simulations to enhance civic knowledge, skills, and engagement at the local, state, and national levels (Hurley, Isenbletter, & Bennion, 2021). Below, we outline three simulations with particularly useful ideas for encouraging civic knowledge. Our goal is to provide readers with models they can adopt and adapt for their own classes.

The pedagogical benefits of active learning strategies, such as service learning and simulations, are well-documented. Shannon Jenkins (2010) pairs both strategies in a single course to leverage those benefits more fully. Her course focuses on state-level politics and sought to address her observation of common student criticisms that state government poses an obstacle to solving problems, and that state legislative leaders do not care about persistent issues faced by constituents. Her goal for the course is to help students understand the complexity of devising public policy remedies and the challenges faced in addressing competing demands on limited government resources. The simulation mimics the state legislative process for creating and passing bills.

The service learning component involves 15 hours of experience in public service organizations intended to inform students on issues they might seek to address through the legislative simulation. These experiences are intended to help students develop a close-up perspective and in-depth knowledge about a particular set of issues so they can develop an informed and impassioned perspective on legislative issues related to their placement. At the end of the semester, a two-week legislative simulation engages students in the law-making process; students shepherd bills, grounded in their service experience, through the legislative process to pass them into law. This includes representing their particular bills to committees in which they engage in detailed debate over the merits of the legislation, whether to merge or amend bills, and ultimately whether to vote to pass certain bills out of committee to the broader assembly. The service-learning experience ostensibly provides students with "special expertise in understanding certain problems in the state, much like the expertise that comes from legislators' committee assignments" (p. 542).

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[20]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357661381_Civic_Engagement_Scholarship_What_We_Can_Learn_from_the_Research

By simulating the state level legislative process, students directly experience the frustrations inherent in addressing issues through legislation, such as working with others who do not share their interest or comprehend the perceptions derived from their direct experience with a specific issue. Sharing the legislative agenda with others who have different priorities deepens student appreciation for the varying priorities of state legislatures and the difficulty of navigating the legislative process. The simulation cultivates civic knowledge in other ways, such as requiring students to select a state senate district to represent and to learn about that district and understand the constituents represented. In addition to submitting a report about their district, students are required to submit at least four bills to the legislature, which may include issues of concern to their constituents rather than deriving solely from their service learning experiences. Students are also required to organize party caucuses and select party leaders.

Janna Deitz and Keith Boeckleman (2021) tap into higher profile national campaigns to enhance students' civic knowledge and promote civic engagement. This article describes how they track student participation in the 2008 presidential election after engaging the students in a mock presidential election a year earlier, using a control group of non-participants to measure the simulation's impact on "relevant measures of civic engagement, including political information, efficacy, and interest in politics" (p. 743). The Mock Presidential Election (MPE) was a large-scale simulation (n>1000) conducted over five days in the fall of 2007 at Western Illinois University. The timing allowed for a one-year follow-up survey to assess its impact on actual student participation in the presidential election of 2008. Many participants were drawn from the university's First Year Experience (FYE) general studies program, so this longitudinal study has the benefit of involving students from diverse disciplines rather than introducing self-selection bias by sorting students according to a pre-established interest in political science.

Like Jenkins, the authors design the simulations to help increase student empathy for challenges faced by elected officials and overcome misconceptions around issues such as the difficulty in building political consensus around policy. Students are assigned states and parties before embarking on a comprehensive simulation, which includes one day dedicated to state primary/caucuses and three days for party conventions including development of platforms, nomination of candidates, and third-party conventions. The final night of the simulation represents the national campaign with students casting their ballots.[21]

The exit interview gathers basic demographic information on the students as well as measures of satisfaction, interest, and information gained as a result of the simulation. The one-year follow-up survey is conducted with students across campus—both participants and non-

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[21]It is unclear from the article whether students cast their ballots based on their own preferences after taking part in a debate about the virtues of the candidates running for each party's nomination, or whether they cast votes based on their assigned party and state affiliations.

participants in the simulation—to assess "self-reported measures of knowledge, civic engagement, interest in politics/public affairs, and political efficacy" (p. 746). Surveys found statistically significant differences between participants and non-participants in the MPE on measures of both political knowledge, political interest and civic engagement. Significantly, the one-year follow-up survey helps to demonstrate the civic efficacy of the simulation by illustrating an actual impact on participation in campaigns and election-related activities that persist a year after the simulation.

The high-profile nature of a national election can engage many students in the political process, but simulations can also be used to catalyze student engagement in local political issues as is demonstrated by Sara R. Rinfret (2012). This simulation closely mirrors the actual local community with students assuming various roles of real people, such as playing specific alderpersons or representing actual business organizations or neighborhood associations within a community. The instructor provides hypothetical scenarios the students can select to work through, but allows students the option to create their own scenario which may mirror actual issues being debated by the local councils. Getting to know the specific individuals or associations they will represent in the simulation, which is part of the research required in preparation for the culminating simulation, provides a real way for students to experience how community actors participate in local governance. Another part of the preparation process requires students to attend and reflect on an actual city council meeting. Even though the course is centered around a simulated council hearing, the people the students represent during the simulation are real; preparation entails getting to know real city leaders and attending actual community meetings as part of their research. In this way, such a simulation brings the local impact of civic knowledge and skills into clear focus for students, many of whom may have previously been focused on the higher profile character of national political issues.

Taken together, these articles provide tangible models for ways that simulations can be applied to civics on local, state, and national levels. Another helpful resource for instructors wishing to incorporate simulations in the classroom can be found in the bibliography "Super Simulations: Trailblazing Ideas for Your Courses," compiled by Elizabeth Bennion and Xander Laughlin in this newsletter in 2015. The bibliography catalogues over 50 articles from the *Journal of Political Science Education* that describe various simulations and organizes them by sub-disciplines including research methods, political theory, comparative politics, international relations, and American politics. Simulations are a powerful way to give students hands-on, experiential learning that develops their understanding of the policy making process, including the competing pressures that policymakers face when passing legislation. Grounding the simulations in personal interactions between students, political decision makers, and the people who are most directly affected by specific policies, enriches students' understanding of the importance of public policy and political engagement.

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**ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES:**

**A REVIEW OF** *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*

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The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education by Leonard Cassuto and Robert Weisbuch (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021) examines the current state of graduate education, the students that undertake this momentous task, and a future for the PhD that looks quite different from where it is today. Simply, this book is about fixing the PhD in the Arts & Sciences. It's a book (in some places a manual) for change. Why do we need a change in doctoral education? Unfortunately, we train PhD students to be professors, when statistically that's not the job they're going to get (15). According to Chapter 1, about half of PhD students in the Arts & Sciences will not complete the degree, another quarter will find jobs outside of academia, and the remaining quarter will find jobs in academia but mostly as part-time faculty or full-time faculty off the tenure track. Every so often, a PhD student will "win the lottery" and grab the brass ring that is the tenure-track job in the Arts & Sciences.

So, if only a quarter of PhD students will attain jobs in academia, why is the PhD curriculum set up to train only those people? Cassuto and Weisbuch argue that PhD education is training professors and professors only, and that is not sustainable based on placement outcomes and demand. If the goal of PhD education is to train the next generation of professors, then admissions should be cut by three-quarters, but that's not happening. There are thousands of PhD students who are fiercely passionate about their subjects that do not want a career in academia, but options are limited in their graduate education and they are chastised for aspiring to careers outside of the academy.

What is the authors' solution to this problem? A more public-facing PhD, "We need a PhD that looks outside the walls of the university, not one that turns inward" (13). The PhD should be individualized and allow students to explore many different avenues, "Good graduate training should unlock and direct students' creativity. Instead of narrowing their vision, we should broaden it, practically as well as intellectually" (16). Having trained in a subject for several years while producing original research to contribute to the field builds scholars who should be able to share their results with everyone and enhance the public discourse, "We need a more socially responsive and engaged PhD, a degree that will return more to our students—and to the world—than the old, hermetic model" (113)[22].

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[22]For more on public scholarship see: *Academics Going Public: How to Write and Speak Beyond Academe* by Marybeth Gasman (Routledge, 2016) and *Going Public: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing) by Corey Fields, Jessie Daniels, and Arlene Stein (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

How does this affect the Political Science PhD? Are there actions we can take to reevaluate the outcomes of the Political Science PhD? Absolutely. A few recommendations about looking at the Political Science PhD through the lens of The New PhD follow:

**Create a Working Group through APSA that takes a critical look at the Political Science PhD**

This working group should be composed of all different types of members that have a stake in the types of outcomes a Political Science PhD should possess: undergraduate students, graduate students, alumni in academia and outside of academia, faculty of all types, higher education administrators, university presidents, and employers outside of academia.

Like any good syllabus design, a rethinking of the Political Science PhD must begin with what the end goals and objectives are. From there, we must work backward to create a course of studies and experiences that obtain those goals. As the authors state, "A key attribute of design thinking is to become a visitor from another planet who keeps asking, 'Why is it this way?' especially when we've taken the way it is for granted" (101). This working group can have in-depth conversations about the foundations of the discipline: are the typical four main subfields too limiting? Could we restructure comprehensive exams to have a longer-lasting effect on graduate students? Could we replace comprehensive exams with a different, but equivalent experience?  The working group should have staggered terms of members so that there are always fresh eyes looking at the information. Lastly, the working group should reconvene every year at the APSA annual meeting and assess where they are. Assessment must be constant to keep up with shifts in the academy and the prospects of PhD candidate employment opportunities. (And the ideas of the working group can be brought back to home departments for evaluation of individual Political Science PhD programs.)

**Involve non-academic resources and courses into the Political Science PhD course of study**

The authors consistently stress that there should be academic and nonacademic opportunities built into every PhD program (74). We should be training PhD students for jobs that are available to them and not shaming students into thinking an academic job is the only way to be successful after obtaining a doctorate. The authors practically exclaim throughout their work that a PhD should be preparing scholars, not professors; scholarly skills are transferable to several workplaces. Moreover, as the authors state, "We should aim not only to admit students from a variety of backgrounds, but we should also aim to admit students who have a variety of goals" (146).

**Include a course that allows students to learn about different options available to them**

Cassuto & Weisbuch are expressly against creating two tracks in a PhD (those who want to become professors vs. those who do not). However, they support creating a space for two seminars that PhD students can bifurcate into—one about the history of higher education, the history of the discipline and pedagogical techniques in undergraduate and graduate classrooms; the other about jobs outside of academia with guest speakers from government and industry and a job-shadowing experience. Both seminars should incorporate community and civic engagement as well as alumni from the program who landed positions in the academy and outside of it (74). These opportunities would give PhD students the opportunity to feel first-hand what a post-PhD career could be like in addition to "TAing." Jobs outside of the academy are also worth having and graduate students should feel that from day one if that is what they'd like to pursue, "to speak of diverse careers is no longer heresy" (115). Including an internship opportunity for PhD students could also achieve many of these goals.

**Exit Interviews with all PhD Students**

Whether a student leaves the program without finishing or does finish, having in-depth exit interviews with all students will inform the department's faculty and can be brought back to the APSA working group. Why did a student leave? What does the student think can be done better in the program?

**A more student-centered approach**

Interdisciplinary study is pervasive and momentum for it continues to gain. The typical "silos" of political science, sociology, and psychology, for example, are breaking down. This is good news as, in life, rarely do things fit into nice separate boxes. Allowing students to be more flexible in course selection and creating their own way enhances the student experience because it allows students to branch off and become experts in their main discipline (political science) and develop interests in adjacent fields as well.

This is also the form many recent job postings have taken on - a political scientist with a specialization in race relations, for example. This allows the Political Science PhD to be a bit more bottom-up than top-down and allows students to take more control of their work and what they are producing.

The authors also relate this to graduate admissions in a fascinating way. For example, a political science department that makes 40 offers would reserve 10 of those offers for students who indicated they would like to work on environmental politics. The departments of Biology, Chemistry, and Sociology would do the same. Now, there is a cohort of 15 - 25 students across

disciplines all working on their disciplines through an environmental lens. All disciplines should market the cohorts and what "theme" is coming up in the next several admissions cycles.

The Political Science PhD certainly has great worth to the academy and to society. By evaluating it through Cassuto and Weisbuch's framework we can see a doctoral program that has strong legs and admirable outcomes, but that could use some rethinking and tweaking. By thinking about public scholarship more critically, allowing a more student-centered approach, and preparing PhD students for the jobs they are actually going to get, we can retool an already prestigious and worthy degree into a powerhouse of public worth and immense personal satisfaction.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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The Distinguished Award for Civic and Community Engagement honors significant civic or community engagement activity by a political scientist, alone or in collaboration with others, which explicitly merges knowledge and practice and goes beyond research to have an impact outside of the profession or the academy. It carries a prize of $1,000 and provides the recipient with funds to organize an activity to advance civically engaged research at the following year's Annual Meeting. The deadline for award nominations is Tuesday, March 1, 2022. For more information or to submit a nomination, go to: https://www.apsanet.org/PROGRAMS/APSA-Awards/APSA-Distinguished-Award-for-Civic-and-Community-Engagement

Archived issues of The Political Science Educator can be found here: https://web.apsanet.org/teachingcivicengagement/political-science-educator/

Please send any article submissions or announcements for future newsletters to the editors at editor.pse.newsletter@gmail.com. Submission deadline is 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 1500 words, and should use APSA citation style. Please include "PS Educator submission" in the subject line of your email, and include a short two sentence biographical statement. The editors reserve the right to make minor corrections for clarity, readability, grammar, spelling, or factual errors. Thank you!