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MESSAGE FROM THE SECTION PRESIDENT

Dear section members:

Wow, it’s hard to believe that I’m writing my last newsletter. What a crazy couple of years we have had! Certainly, I did not realize that the bulk of my time as chair of this section would be during a pandemic. I first have to recognize all of the amazing officers and executive members who serve with me – Michael Rogers, Joseph Roberts, Maureen Feeley, Rachel Walker, Mark Romm, Cherie Strachan, Megan Becker, Colin Brown, and of course the past chair and best advisor, Patrick McKinley. Many of us assembled in Seattle last September and we look forward to seeing many more of our members in Montreal this coming September.

It is only fitting that longtime member and mentor of this section, John Ishiyama is currently serving as APSA President. His task force will be focusing on “Rethinking Political Science Education,” and it could not be more important, especially as we structure and organize our educational programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in the face of the current challenges of social unrest and the global pandemic. As John has pointed out, we need to think about how we run our conferences, how we interact as colleagues, how we influence policy makers, how we publish and make our research consumable to a broader public, and maybe most importantly, how we teach! Our section is committed to assisting John as he moves forward with the recommendations and the final report to the discipline.

The theme for the annual meeting is “Rethink, Restructure, and Reconnect: Towards a Post-Pandemic Political Science” and will be held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada from September 15-18. One of the co-chairs of the conference is a recent past president of the PSE Section, Sherri Wallace (University of Louisville). The program co-chairs for the PSE Section at the meeting are Bobbi Gentry (Bridgewater College) and Laura Roost (Newberry College). The PSE Section Business Meeting will be held Friday, September 16 from 6:30-7:30 (tentatively scheduled for the Palais Room 512D). Please make plans to attend as we will have elections for officers and new members to the section along with other section business.

The Teaching & Learning Conference at APSA in Montreal (Saturday, September 17) is co-chaired by Julio F. Carrion (University of Delaware) and Allison Rank (SUNY-Oswego). Committee members include Emmanuel Balogun (Skidmore College), Natasha Duncan (Purdue University), Kevin Anderson (Eastern Illinois University), and Taiyi Sun (Christopher Newport University). If you have not registered for TLC@APSA, please do!

Our next stand-alone Teaching & Learning Conference will be held in Baltimore, MD February 10-12, 2023. The call for proposals and more information will be coming soon! This TLC is co-chaired by Rebecca Glazier (University of Arkansas at Little
Rock) and Young-Im Lee (California State University-Sacramento). Other committee members include Delina Barrera (Texas Southernmost College), Kathleen Cole (Metropolitan State University), Anthony Kamma (University of Southern California), Eric Loepp (University of Wisconsin, Whitewater) and Mathew Platt (Morehouse College).

Many of you responded to our survey indicating your interests in serving the PSE Section and/or APSA and those recommendations are being passed on. If you did not complete the survey, please contact Maureen Feeley (mfeeley@ucsd.edu) and she will provide the link.

As many of you know, there was a call for a new Editorial Team for the Journal of Political Science Education and the 2022-2026 Editorial Team was announced. The Journal will be housed at Kennesaw State University and the new team is:

- Editor-in-Chief – Charity Butcher (Kennesaw State University)
- Lead Editor – Alasdair Blair (De Montfort University)

Associate Editors – Tavishi Bhasin (Kennesaw State University), Elizabeth Gordon (Kennesaw State University), Maia Carter Hallward (Kennesaw State University), Alison Rios Millett McCartney (Towson University), and Simon Usherwood (Open University).

I encourage each of you to take advantage of APSAEducate – it is a tremendous resource for all of us so involved in teaching. Michelle Allendoerfer and Bennett Grubbs with APSA are doing a fantastic job helping to create teaching symposia to bring us together to share ideas and then posting those ideas and resources on the website.

Finally, a big shout out to Colin Brown (Northeastern University) and Matt Evans (Northwest Arkansas Community College) for co-editing this newsletter, and Nick Kapoor (Fairfield University) for reading and soliciting submissions.

As you can see, most of my news is thanking all of the people who work so hard to make this section so successful. It has been my honor and a huge pleasure to work with all of you and I can honestly say that some of my best friends today come out of the relationships I have formed as a result of this section! (Monday night zoom group – you rock!)

All my best,

Terry Gilmour

(tgilmour@midland.edu)

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Terry Gilmour is a Professor of Political Science/Government at Midland College and President of the APSA Section on Political Science Education.
Many colleges and universities encourage faculty media engagement to demonstrate the expertise of the faculty, raise the profile of the university, and serve the public good. Media engagement is one of many ways to integrate teaching, research, and service – and often the most visible option available.

As a faculty member at Indiana University South Bend, I engage with media in numerous ways: I host a weekly public affairs television program; I provide expert analysis for local, state, national, and international media outlets; I write research-informed op eds for local and national newspapers; and I work with local and statewide media to produce televised political debates and non-partisan voter guides. In this essay, I draw upon over two decades of media engagement and more than 700 media appearances to advise faculty who wish to partner with the media to educate the public about politics.

**Call back promptly and work with reporters’ deadlines.** Reporters are often on a tight deadline. Ask for 30 minutes (or more) to pull your thoughts together. The required lead time will depend on your schedule, your familiarity with the topic, and the type of interview. TV interviews may require additional prep time to be camera ready. (I keep a makeup bag, curling iron, hair spray, and suit jacket in my office just in case reporters call for comments on breaking stories.) Don’t feel pressured to provide the interview immediately. It is appropriate to tell the reporter when you will be available. Find out when the reporter is expected to turn in the story and schedule accordingly. Calling back promptly and making yourself available to reporters is a big part of becoming part of their in-house list of media experts. Accepting only those interviews that you can reasonably fit into your schedule, responding even if you cannot do a specific interview, and letting reporters know that you will be available for future stories will keep you on the list.

**Find out why the reporter wants to interview you.** Ask what information the reporter is looking for and what information the reporter has already gathered. This will help you determine how much detail you should provide in your interview. It is appropriate to ask reporters what topics they plan to cover or what general questions they plan to ask. This allows you to determine if you are the correct “expert” for the story, while also allowing you to prepare efficiently. Also ask how the information you provide will be used. Does the reporter need a quick soundbite or two on a specific topic for a brief news story or extensive background information for a longer feature story? This is important to know so that you can prepare accordingly.

**Refer reporters to another expert if you do not have the time or expertise required.** You do not need to be the leading expert in the field to add to the public’s understanding of a topic. Often the story angle is general enough that a
specialist – or “leading expert” in the field - is not required. Staying up-to-date on the research may be all that is required.

**Teaching a topic in your classes prepares you to explain the topic to the public.** If a reporter is writing a story about the nomination of the first black woman to the Supreme Court, you do not need to be a constitutional lawyer, or the nation’s leading expert on the U.S. Supreme Court and the judicial nomination process, to comment. If you teach about the Supreme Court in your introductory American politics course while also teaching upper-level courses in racial, ethnic, and gender politics you can answer the questions of greatest interest to the reporter and audience for this story. The appropriate level of expertise depends on the angle of the story, which is why it is important to ask about this up front before agreeing to the interview.

**Leverage your skills as a teacher to make the story understandable to the audience.** There are several ways to do this: don’t assume prior knowledge, avoid technical jargon, define your terms, and provide relevant, interesting, and memorable examples. These are all skills good teachers employ in the classroom. Most importantly, keep it simple. Don’t assume the audience has a strong background in politics. Journalists are trained to write their stories so that they can be understood by an eighth grader. Your job is to make political science research relevant and accessible to the public. Focus on communicating clearly and helping the audience to understand the topic.

**Prepare a list of key points to cover during each interview, just as you would a class.** Make these points compelling, concise, and credible. Being concise is critical. Reporters have a very limited amount of space or time to tell a story. Prepare 2-3 specific talking points that you want to use during the interview to create clear, compelling, and memorable pull quotes that tell a good story.

**Use repetition to convey the major points and help the public understand the story.** Unless the interview is live, a reporter will choose which quotes to use in the story. It is okay to repeat key talking points throughout the interview and to raise them, again, when the reporter asks if you have any final thoughts. It is a good idea to practice these talking points in advance. For your own sense of comfort and confidence, you might also prepare a note card containing important names, dates, and statistics. Be careful not to become overly reliant on these notes during the interview. Most reporters are not looking for a detailed literature review or detailed research findings, and it never looks (or sounds) good for a guest to search through --- or read from --- notes on air.

**Consider how you appear to the audience for TV interviews.** Pay attention to your appearance and body language on TV. Dress professionally and avoid clothing or backgrounds that may distract the viewers. Solid colors are generally better than patterns. Sit up straight and avoid nervous habits such as twitching, tapping on the table, or using excessive hand gestures and facial expressions. If you are not sure what to do with your hands, lean on one arm and fold or overlap your hands.
together comfortably. Make eye contact with the reporter during in-office and studio interviews (unless instructed otherwise) and look directly into the web cam for Zoom interviews. Speak clearly and confidently and be succinct.

**Adjust your interview style to suit the medium.** When doing radio interviews or podcasts, speak clearly and succinctly as you do for television, but shift to a more conversational style, and use descriptive words, metaphors, and storytelling, as appropriate, to create visual images in listeners’ minds. While it is tempting to be more informal with print or online media reporters who are not recording the session for broadcast, remember that the reporter can quote anything you say. Be as clear and concise as possible and avoid tangents and off-the-record story-telling that might mistakenly end up in the final story.

**Avoid self-promotion, but draw upon your own expertise as appropriate.** Providing a list of publications or cataloging your own accomplishments and awards is not appropriate. Sharing the findings of highly relevant research that you, or others, have conducted is very appropriate. This is particularly true if you were contacted specifically because you conducted groundbreaking research with direct relevance to the story. Keep in mind that most news stations cover current events, not political science research. While an occasional national newspaper or news magazine reporter may want details about your research findings, most reporters are seeking basic comments on political trends or current events. You are there to help the audience make sense of the news or put today’s events in a broader context, not to give a political science research seminar.

**Limit technical jargon and details about your research design when sharing your research.** Include only those elements of the research design that are critical to understanding why the study is important and explain the significance of such design decisions in a language that non-experts can understand. Also simplify research findings to focus on key takeaway points rather than detailed numbers or statistics. Keep the use of numbers to a minimum and don’t assume strong quantitative literacy skills. It is generally best to talk about overall trends and findings rather than percentages. Only use numbers if they are essential to support a key talking point.

**Focus on top line findings and main effects with direct relevance to the story.** There is a big difference between a conference presentation, or classroom lecture, and a media interview. If you discuss specific research at all, focus on a key finding that the audience should know rather than presenting a full list of hypotheses and findings.

**Understand the audience.** Audiences may be suspicious of specialists and experts, including college professors. Avoid playing into the stereotype of the out-of-touch professor. This is especially important if there are town-gown tensions in your community or you work at an “elite” institution. Knowing the audience and thinking about how best to reach them is important. Using accessible language,
providing a fair and honest analysis, and focusing on known facts is critical when seeking credibility with a skeptical audience.

**Consider how you add value to the story.** When working with local or statewide media outlets, it is usually helpful to think about how national or international events will affect people in your community, state, or region. Providing a local perspective on the national news is a big part of the job for reporters working in local media markets. You should be prepared to discuss the impact of current events or new legislation for local readers and viewers. How will Russia’s invasion of Ukraine affect gas and grocery prices in your area? What will the changes to the federal child tax credit mean for local families? How will the Supreme Court decision on abortion affect laws in your state?

**Decide what name and title you will use when granting an interview.** If you serve in several capacities, clarify with the reporter why they are contacting you. Is it in your capacity as a college professor, a local elected official, or a civic group leader? Your remarks and title should reflect this focus. Also consider whether you will act as a spokesperson for other groups at all if you are granting interviews in your role as an academic. Only you can make this decision and it is important to consider how wearing “several hats” might (positively or negatively) affect your perceived credibility as a subject matter expert. Regardless of your decision, it is important to clarify the spelling and pronunciation of your name and your correct title at the beginning of each interview. It is also a good idea to clarify the name of your institution. If administrators prefer a specific abbreviation (e.g. “IU South Bend” versus “IUSB”) let reporters and producers know this.

**Avoid saying more than you know and making predictions as much as possible.** Reporters love to ask political scientists to make predictions about elections and court cases. Stay within the scope of what we can reasonably predict based on the data available. Stating that you feel confident that the Republicans will retain their majority status in the Indiana General Assembly makes good sense, but predicting that Trump will once again win the GOP nomination and the presidency in 2024 is a much bigger gamble. Similarly, noting that the president’s party almost always loses seats in the general election and talking about the factors that will make the 2022 midterm an uphill battle for Democrats is better than predicting exactly how many seats Democrats and Republicans will win in the House and Senate. Consider whether you want to go “on record” making early predictions that may not come true. While making an educated guess after researching past performance, forecasting models, and current political context may be reasonable, providing an “off-the-cuff” prediction on air, or in print, might undermine your credibility.

**Develop positive relationships with both new and well-established reporters.** Follow-up after a successful interview isn’t necessary, but can be useful. A thoughtful message - with an invitation to contact you again in the future - can increase the likelihood of repeat interviews. If you make a mistake, it is fine to
contact the reporter to correct or clarify. It is also appropriate to let a reporter know when they got something wrong. Local reporters are very seldom experts in politics and misstatements of facts and misquotes can often be corrected quickly for the online version of the story. The “compliment sandwich” approach is useful when offering advice or requesting a correction. Compliment the reporter on good things about the story, notify the reporter about any errors that need to be corrected, and end by offering to work together again — unless the error is intentional or so egregious that you feel a need to add the report to your “no contact” list. The frequent turnover of reporters at local media outlets provides an opportunity to mentor new reporters who may be completely unfamiliar with politics in your state and region. Cub reporters often appreciate an opportunity to learn and grow, especially if communications and “teachable moments” are handled appropriately. This is another way that teaching experience comes in handy when working with the media.

**In conclusion, the same skills that make a professor successful in the classroom make them a potentially valuable media contact.** Working with the media is a rewarding way to put the teacher-scholar model into practice. It draws upon your scholarly expertise while allowing you to serve the public by teaching beyond the classroom.

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*Elizabeth A. Bennion is Chancellor’s Professor of Political Science at Indiana University South Bend, and she is co-chair of the APSA Section on Civic Engagement.*
Research Note

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

By John C. Davis (davisjc@uamont.edu) and Adam McKee (mcke@uamont.edu)

The University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM) is a comprehensive, open-enrollment, rural-serving university. Our aim in this study was to measure the perceptions of UAM students regarding Open Educational Resources (OER). Using an online survey created and administered through Google Forms, we surveyed 109 students in a cross-section of criminal justice and political science courses that utilized OER course materials. We predicted that younger students would prefer technological modes of delivery, while older and less technologically savvy students would prefer traditional textbooks. An alternative to traditional, commercially published texts was also considered. A handful of OER producers (most notably OpenStax at Rice University) have begun publishing OER materials as printed books for a low price.

While the range of ages within the sample was broad, students tended to cluster in the traditional student age range from 18 to 22 years of age. Due to the nature of the classes we were teaching when the survey was conducted, seniors were overrepresented in the sample. Females were overrepresented in the sample versus the 50% to 50% ratio that one would expect from overall population data. This imbalance reflects national trends regarding college enrollment disparities by sex (Carrasco 2021).

We asked the students if the purchase price of textbooks factored into whether or not they purchased the textbook. Around 87% of the students surveyed indicated that price was the crucial factor in purchasing the text. It seems safe to conclude that students consider costs as a critical component of whether or not to buy required materials for courses. This theme was underscored several times in the free-response question that ended the survey. As one student put it, “I prefer it [OER] because as a college student living paycheck to paycheck, the pricing for books can be outrageous. It means a lot when the professor cares enough to understand this and to do what they can to make it easier for their students.” To put it more bluntly, another student quipped, “I like free stuff. I don’t have any money so this is great.”

Even students who prefer printed material support OER, and some are willing to go so far as to print digital material on their own. As one student suggested, “I would recommend it as it helps to mitigate the cost to students while also providing the option of printing out materials if you prefer a hard copy.” It seems as if there is a utility calculus, and at some price point, nearly every student will decline the buy even the required materials. One student explained, “It’s more likely for students to use it [OER] than purchasing an overpriced textbook.” This opinion is not limited to traditional college students but seems to cut across age groups.
Students are also concerned about how college costs impact other areas of their lives. As one student explains, “I would personally want to be in that class if that professor were to use an OER. Coming from a household where money could be tight at times, it is good to know that there is a possibility of having a free online book that I could possibly print to fit my preferences for a college class.”

We wondered whether students preferred digital readings to printed materials. According to the data, their preferences are nuanced. We asked students to indicate their preferred modality for reading class materials. Preferred digital platforms were varied; web pages were popular (20%), as were Portable Document Format (PDF) files (44%). Very few students indicated that they preferred ebook (e.g., Kindle) formats. We were surprised that a full third still preferred print materials. The data strongly suggest that students at UAM have a strong preference for digital media. Those that grew up in the post-smartphone world are accustomed to instantaneous (and effortless) access to free information. One student explained, “I prefer online because it’s free and easier to access at all times.” Some students believe that their preference is universal among students, suggesting a quantum shift over the past several years.

When asked to state their preferences based on recent experience, just under 20% of students indicated that they preferred a traditional textbook. The balance indicated that they either had no preference or preferred the OER materials. Of the three options, the largest category was “I prefer the OER materials,” with over 58% of students selecting that category. When asked about the perceived quality of OER materials, nearly 47% of students indicated that they believed that OER materials were superior in quality to traditional textbooks, and around 46% indicated that they perceived no difference in quality between OER and traditional textbooks. Only 7.8% believed that the traditionally purchased materials were of superior quality. Some of the students that suggested that they preferred traditional textbooks for quality reasons would not, it seems, go so far as to buy them. We were surprised to learn that even some of the students who preferred to read printed materials would still choose digital materials if they were completely free instead of “very low cost.”

As was suggested above, students seem to appreciate multiple modes of content delivery. As one student explains, “I would recommend the OER materials because you can access it anywhere via laptop, tablet, or smartphone without having to pay a large amount.” A substantial number of students want to see print versions in that mix. For many students, merely having the ability to print seems adequate: “I would recommend an option where it can be printed so it will be easier to study in.”

Another student suggested that engagement with course materials would be more likely if they were available in multiple formats. Ultimately, we agree with the student that stated: “I’d suggest using OER with the option to get a printed version.” While the data gathered in this study suggests that cost is among the top concerns of students, they are not blind to quality issues. One student explains, “The reason why is because it would save me money and I prefer reading material
online rather than reading from a textbook. The only thing I would recommend is that the OER materials come from a quality source.”

Conclusion

While the most common reason students stated for supporting OER was cost, other reasons are woven into their comments. One student explained several advantages. Until reading through the open responses, we never considered OER as a method of enhancing student opinions of both professors and the courses that they teach. Several students used terms such as “grateful” and “blessed” to describe their feelings toward professors that used OER. While the particulars of student needs and preferences vary from person to person, the consensus seems to be, in the words of one enthusiastic student, “OER materials in all classes would be the best news ever.” Even those that prefer traditional textbooks are willing to make concessions based on the cost concerns of all students.

It is easy to underestimate how important the issue of textbooks is to students. Most of the faculty do not seem to assign the same gravity to the problem that students often do. One student explained, “We are broke college kids and are already paying money to take the class and adding expensive textbooks that we are required to buy breaks the bank for many students.” Additionally, until reading the open responses, we never considered OER as a method of enhancing student opinions of both professors and the courses that they teach. Several students used terms such as “grateful” and “blessed” to describe their feelings toward professors that used OER.

We hope this research note encourages faculty to consider the student benefits of OER materials. Future researchers in this area will no doubt want to consider the longitudinal advancement of technology. Preferences for traditional print media may decline as more and more students do not remember a time without ubiquitous digital reading platforms and content.

References


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John C. Davis is an associate professor of political science at the University of Arkansas at Monticello. Adam McKee is a professor of criminal justice at the University of Arkansas at Monticello.
Research Note

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTIONS IN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECTS

By David J. Fleming (david.fleming@furman.edu) and Price St. Clair (jpricestclair@gmail.com)

Many universities and university towns are becoming increasingly popular as retirement destinations for senior citizens. The AARP\textsuperscript{1} estimates that at least 80 universities have collaborated with continuing-care retirement communities. In addition to these senior living communities, older adults are also welcomed on college campuses via “lifelong learning” programs. More than 125 colleges and universities across America currently partner with the Bernard Osher Foundation to sponsor Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes (OLLI).\textsuperscript{2} Programs like OLLI provide non-credit academic courses and other learning opportunities for participants. The senior adults in communities like these explicitly choose to be a part of them and tend to be genuinely interested in learning and taking advantage of their proximity to college campuses. These trends provide opportunities for university partnerships that can benefit undergraduate students and promote intergenerational learning. In this article, we describe our experiences over six semesters in which undergraduate students completed a research assignment that included an opportunity for the participation of senior adults in the data collection phase and as attendees at a research poster presentation event. We also present descriptive survey results that highlight students’ interest in including senior adults in class activities.

Brief Description of the Assignment

All Politics and International Affairs (PIA) majors at Furman University are required to take Introduction to Political Analysis, which covers various approaches to the study of political science, research methods, and statistics up to multivariate regression. A semester-long group research project for the course is the focus of this article.

Earlier iterations of this class included a research poster presentation that involved different sections of the course, and all PIA majors were invited. Outside of students in the class, attendance was often quite low, and the event did not appropriately reflect the amount of work the Political Analysis students put into their projects. Around this time, a colleague had a discussion with a representative from the Woodlands at Furman, a senior living retirement community that is adjacent to Furman’s campus, about getting more interaction between Furman students and residents at the Woodlands. To create a better research poster event and an opportunity for intergenerational connections, instructors of the Political Analysis class began partnering with the Woodlands at Furman and Furman’s OLLI

\textsuperscript{1} http://www.aarp.org/retirement/planning-for-retirement/info-2019/colleges-with-retirement-communities.html
\textsuperscript{2} https://www.oshерfoundation.org/олli.html
program, which provides classes, social events, and service opportunities for over 2,600 local senior adults.\(^3\)

The research project assignment begins early in the semester. After reviewing what makes a good research question and the different types of data collection procedures, we ask each student in the class to submit possible research questions. Students then give their preferences among the research ideas and are assigned to groups of 2-4.

Students then consider how to go about examining their research question. In the past, students have interviewed community leaders, performed content analyses of social media posts, and created and implemented their own surveys. Over the next few weeks of class, we work with each of the groups to ensure that their data collection is going smoothly, including assisting with IRB approval. The research project culminates with a poster presentation where we provide guidance and resources on poster construction (see Powner 2015).

**Using Senior Adult Community Members as Potential Research Subjects**

One way to include senior adults in this research project is as study participants. Two years ago, one group surveyed both Furman students and OLLI members in order to draw comparisons. They created an online survey that was distributed by group members to Furman students and by the OLLI administration to their members. This group received over 450 responses with approximately 250 coming from OLLI members. Given that the nearest polling location to Furman’s campus is at the Woodlands, Political Analysis students have also collected election exit polling data at the Woodlands for their posters. Most voters at this location are Furman students or residents of the retirement community. Another possibility is for students to collect qualitative data from senior adults via interviews or focus groups. Not only does access to OLLI and retirement community members increase the sample size of the analyses, but the students and senior adults also enjoyed seeing the results on topics that were directly applicable to them. For example, one Political Analysis group examined support for marijuana legalization and received many comments from senior adults about how this topic brought back memories from their college days. Another group used survey data from students and OLLI members to examine political polarization, which sparked discussions between students and senior adults about how political parties have changed since the 1960s.

**Including Senior Adults at the Poster Presentation Event**

The culmination of the research project assignment is a research poster presentation hosted by The Woodlands or OLLI. The Woodlands and OLLI promote the poster presentations with emails to their members and flyers in their buildings. The poster presentation event operates like an academic conference, as the senior

\(^3\) The coronavirus pandemic put a halt to this activity, but we hope to continue this event in future semesters.
adults and Political Analysis students walk around the room and discuss the posters with the presenters. The event typically lasts 1-1.5 hours, and between 30-50 senior adults usually attend the event. After the event, the PIA department keeps the posters and displays them throughout the academic year to promote and celebrate the work done by students in the class.

**Evaluation of the Research Project Assignment**

While Political Analysis students have often commented that they enjoyed the poster presentation experience in student evaluations, we believed that a more direct investigation into the efficacy of this assignment was warranted. We emailed an online survey to all students that were taking the Political Analysis class in spring 2020 (n = 29) and to all other PIA majors (n = 170) to examine student attitudes toward intergenerational learning and the poster event.

First, we examined how common intergenerational learning is. We asked all survey respondents, “Thinking about your educational experiences in and out of schools, how often have you been in a learning environment with different age groups (e.g., young adults, middle-aged people, senior citizens; excluding teachers & professors)?” Students stated that they do not have many formal intergenerational learning opportunities. Approximately 56% of respondents said that they are never or rarely in a learning environment with members of different age groups. Students indicated that they were more likely to be in a learning environment with people from different races, political ideologies, and income levels, than people of different age groups.⁴

Our second research question focused on students’ experiences with the poster presentation. We asked students who participated in the poster event a series of questions to investigate if this assignment was worth the effort. Students generally had positive attitudes toward the inclusion of senior adults in the poster presentations (Table 1). Students were asked if presenting their “research to an audience of older adults, rather than to my peers, made the experience more enjoyable.” Thirty percent strongly agreed and another 40% somewhat agreed. Over 70% of respondents agreed that presenting their research to senior adults rather than their peers made them take the assignment more seriously. When asked if the PIA department should continue working with OLLI and the Woodlands members as part of the poster event, over two-thirds of students strongly agreed that it should be continued. It is possible that this experience also enhanced their interest in intergenerational learning in other areas. Almost three-fourths of students who participated in the poster presentation agreed that “professors should try to include older adults like those at OLLI or the Woodlands in other types of class projects or activities.”

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⁴ This result is largely due to the fact that Furman is a residential, four-year university with the vast majority of students aged 18-22. The student bodies of other colleges and universities may certainly have more age diversity than Furman does.
We encourage instructors to consider other possible intergenerational learning opportunities with senior adults in nearby retirement communities or who participate in university-affiliated lifelong learning programs. Classes on political socialization, civil rights, social movements, and many other areas could benefit from having senior adults included. Besides providing an opportunity for students to learn from people with first-hand experience of many important political events and trends, these types of interactions have been found to empower students, improve students’ leadership skills, and promote intercultural learning and intergenerational solidarity (Corrigan et al. 2013; Lawrence-Jacobson 2006).

Table 1: Views on Inclusion of Senior Adults in Poster Presentations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senior Adults Made It More Enjoyable</th>
<th>Senior Adults Made Me Take It More Seriously</th>
<th>Keep This Assignment</th>
<th>Include Senior Adults in Other Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>5.97</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<td>4.55</td>
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<td>11.94</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>15.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>39.39</td>
<td>41.79</td>
<td>16.67</td>
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<td>29.85</td>
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Based on our experiences, opportunities for continued learning is a major reason why many of these senior adults choose to participate in university-affiliated programs and communities. While sustained interactions throughout a semester between undergraduate and senior adults have been found to lead to positive outcomes (e.g., Corrigan et al. 2013), we believe that even one-off activities with senior adults are worthwhile. Our students are interested in participating in more intergenerational learning opportunities and believe that learning with senior adults provides a unique benefit to them. Given the increasing number of university-affiliated programs throughout the country, political scientists should make the most out of these opportunities for intergenerational learning.

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BRINGING THE STUDENTS BACK IN: HOW TO RE-ENGAGE STUDENTS IN A “POST-COVID” WORLD

By Reyhan Topal (rtopal@albany.edu) and Farzin Shargh (fshargh@albany.edu)

The 2021-22 academic year was the first full year since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic that many higher education institutions transitioned back to traditional modes of delivery (Hartocollis 2021a). The transition back to in-person teaching, however, was not without its challenges. This has been especially the case for junior faculty and teaching assistants. Some of the difficulties we focus on here relate to additional expectations from teachers to monitor students’ compliance with the institutional Covid policies, requiring leniency towards students’ absences and their low levels of engagement, and the difficulties in utilizing classical methods of engagement that are expected in in-person teaching. We also propose helpful strategies for instructors and teaching assistants to overcome these difficulties.

While transitioning to mostly in-person classes in the Fall of 2021, most institutions adopted Covid precautionary measures to ensure the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff. While many institutions transparently relayed their Covid policies before the start of the semester, they also released new faculty guidelines that identify instructors’ new responsibilities to maintain a safe class environment and strategies to follow when there are uncompliant students (Walke et al. 2020; Hartocollis 2021b). In our case, we sometimes had to stop our lectures, student presentations, or class discussion to ask uncompliant students to put their masks back on or make sure their masks fully covered their noses and mouths. This additional role of “the Covid police” was not only a burden on us but also disrupted our class time and put further distance between us and our students, jeopardizing student engagement that was already scarce due to a year and a half of virtual learning.

To tackle the problem above, first and foremost, we strongly encourage all instructors and teaching assistants to consistently follow their institutions’ Covid policies. When some instructors tolerate uncompliant students or occasionally violate the Covid policies themselves, their students are likely to expect the same tolerance from other instructors. The discrepancy in the compliance levels of instructors negatively affects student engagement for two reasons. Firstly, it creates the impression that some instructors are deliberately stricter on their students regarding the Covid measures, which could deteriorate the relationship between those instructors and students. Therefore, students might be less enthusiastic about attending the lectures of those instructors or actively participating in class discussions. Secondly, students assume that if they violate Covid measures constantly, their instructors will ease the Covid measures in the classroom. While instructors warn students of these violations, it might be difficult to maintain the class discussion. To this effect, at the beginning of the semester, we conveyed to our students that we would commit to Covid policies consistently to ensure everyone’s safety and eliminate any ambiguities. We believe that
announcing our firm commitment to Covid policies from the beginning helped our students adapt to the “post-Covid” class environment more quickly. Therefore, we could minimize the disruptions and maintain our class discussions more effectively.

The dynamics of Covid-19 required leniency when dealing with student absences, which was further exacerbated by the spread of Covid-19 variants throughout the year. Many students did not need to see a medical professional for Covid-19, especially with the prevalence of testing, including at-home rapid tests. Under these conditions, we had no choice but to excuse students’ absences, often without documentation. At times, the number of excused absences for a student would outnumber the days that they were present throughout the semester. From another perspective, the increased number of absences meant having very low classroom engagement and frequently lecturing to an almost-empty classroom. However, we also could not force students to attend in person, given the culpability of potentially spreading Covid-19 to others.

Given that at-home rapid testing is valuable in managing the spread of the virus, instructors cannot require students to see a medical professional to prove that they really have Covid. As a solution, we recommend instructors and teaching assistants emphasize in the classroom that trust is an important component of the student-teacher relationship. In the first meeting of the semester, we made a small talk about the role of trust and honesty in creating a positive classroom environment, which is more conducive to teaching and learning. During the talk, we emphasized that students should avoid falsely claiming that they tested positive for Covid for being absent because it was unethical and could worsen the pandemic anxiety of others, especially those who have been in contact with them. When our students grasped the consequences of falsifying a Covid case vis-a-vis others, they became more reluctant to use it as an excuse.

While many students requested to join the class virtually when they were unwell, we had to run a “hybrid” class most of the time, which was rather challenging. Almost always, we spent the beginning of the class fixing technical issues, such as admitting virtual students into the platform and making sure the audio and video systems were working as they should. Even on the days that the technology was cooperating, the students joining virtually could not see both their classmates and us at the same time, and the audio seldom picked up the sound of the whole classroom. From the other point of view, in-person students had issues like not seeing their virtual classmates while also seeing the presentation slides. Troubleshooting all these issues, if there was a solution, often took valuable time that we could instead spend discussing the course material.

To address these issues, we suggest that instructors and teaching assistants divide the class discussions into two parts. For the same discussion questions, we let our students in the classroom collaborate, while virtually participating students discussed the same questions in the break-out rooms. We also assigned a discussion leader to each break-out room to ensure that all students in the same
room contributed to the discussion. After the discussion time ends, we listened to the answers of the students in the classroom and asked virtual participants to comment on their peers’ responses, while students in the classroom did the same for the virtual participants. This way, we managed to have our students actively engage with one another and listen to the ideas of their classmates.

Returning to mostly in-person classes seemed like the revival of the pre-pandemic times; however, the 2021-22 academic year was still far from a normal pre-pandemic academic experience. One of the benefits of holding in-person classes is being able to utilize traditional methods of teaching and engagement within the classroom. However, the reality of Covid-19 spreading, and infecting people restricted instructors from using many teaching tools that would benefit the students. Perhaps most significantly, small-group activities were still viewed as dangerous. Students, and instructors, were not too comfortable interacting in small groups, knowing that they could increase the chances of Covid-19 infection. Another restriction was in activities such as poster presentations that are often popular with undergraduate students. While poster presentations are a good practice to get students used to academic conference poster sessions, arranging students around the class, and making students walk around the room and interact with the presenters was not wise knowing that Covid-19 could easily be transmitted among students.

We believe an engaged class environment is crucial to mitigating any Covid-19 learning loss. Instead of eliminating in-class activities due to the safety concerns mentioned above, we advise instructors and teaching assistants to modify their in-class activities. As educational games have proven to improve student engagement (Asal 2005; Torney-Purta 1996), we used role-playing and simulation games to keep our students engaged with limited physical contact. For example, in a world politics class, we assigned a country role to each student, asked them to prepare a one-minute-long speech on a given topic, and told them to criticize another country’s policies on the topic. In doing so, we encouraged each student to have a say and interact with their classmates while social distancing. Our other effective strategy was “peer assessment” on poster presentations to improve communication among students (Weaver and Esposto 2011). Given that holding poster sessions in a small classroom poses a safety risk, we asked our students to prepare their posters online and had one student present their poster at a time. After each presentation, students gave constructive feedback on the posters, which also increased student engagement.

Returning to in-class teaching has been a challenging transition for instructors and teaching assistants who work hard to re-engage students without jeopardizing their health. In this post, we underlined some obstacles to student engagement and proposed our strategies to tackle them. Despite the ongoing risks and challenges, we are hopeful that instructors can reignite students’ engagement in a “post-pandemic” world.
References


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Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, and Democracy: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Tackle Misinformation and Prepare Students for Active Citizenship

By Barbara Robertson (broberson@gsu.edu) and Tamra Ortgies-Young (tortgiesyoung@gsu.edu)

Recent political events highlight the fragility of democratic values and the need for the University in creating a framework for civic education becomes more urgent. Our students face the challenge of living in an information age filled with misinformation and an increasingly fragile democratic system. This mistrust of information in politics, science, and pop culture undermines public inquiry within universities and society, and it creates apathy for distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources of information. Educational institutions have been addressing this crisis for decades by equipping students with critical thinking skills (Watson et al. 2011). However, the integration of critical thinking into higher education endured debates over what constitutes critical thinking (e.g., formal vs. informal logic) and fears that teaching these skills might come at the expense of teaching academic content. Jonathan Haber debunks this myth: “Since background knowledge, including knowledge of content related to the academic disciplines, is a vital part of being a critical thinker, understanding content and thinking critically about it do not need to come into conflict” (Haber 2020). In other words, virtually all courses can provide an opportunity to build critical thinking skills.

To address these political and pedagogical issues, three faculty members--two political scientists and a philosopher working at a two-year access college within a large public, urban university--applied for and won an internal innovation team grant. Our proposal outlined an interdisciplinary module to enhance student information literacy while targeting those competencies of informed citizenship. The inspiration and rationale behind our project included: (1) the civic responsibility that institutions of higher education have vis-à-vis their students; (2) the complex world of information that students must navigate as part of their education; (3) the roles that critical thinking and media literacy play in enabling them to do this; and (4) the recognition that a wide array of courses can serve as a basis for introducing students to these skills by supplementing, rather than sacrificing, course content.

The module we created, “Critical Thinking in the Age of Misinformation,” gives faculty members the opportunity to integrate critical thinking and media literacy skills into existing core courses. It is interactive and customizable to meet the unique nature of the subject matter, the pedagogical preferences of the instructor, and the desired learning outcomes for the students. The curriculum includes six short lessons to guide students in overcoming common obstacles: evaluating the credibility of information and sources, understanding the makeup and evolution of the media environment, learning to apply reasoning, identifying and avoiding fallacies in written and oral discourse, and understanding the importance of informed citizenship.
The module teaches critical thinking skills of determining the value of information. This is achieved by differentiating between the varying quality of sources, identifying motivations for disinformation, becoming aware of common reasons for misinformation and reflecting on how bad information is a danger to democracy. We determined early on that it was essential to create a module that was engaging by appealing to student culture. The lessons are titled:

- Introduction to Critical Thinking
- Junk Sources
- Zombie Logic
- Social Mania
- Fake News
- Conspiracy Theories

The hook inspired titles of each section carry out through each segment with interactive activities enhanced with theme-based design elements including zombies, junk food analogies, deep fakes, and viral mania.

To meet our goals of effectiveness, efficiency, and versatility we developed the cross-disciplinary learning outcomes, current content, and practice opportunities in a logical and straightforward format easily integrated into an existing course. Therefore, we worked to create an optimal student experience that meets expected learning outcomes, while reducing barriers for instructor implementation and student navigation. Due to the collaborative nature of the content development and pilot, by the end of the Fall term, we recruited 20 enthusiastic instructors to assign the lessons in Spring courses.

To achieve the goals of versatility and flexibility in design and delivery, we created the lesson content, first as PowerPoints and then using the slide content to inform the HTML version of the lessons. For this reason, faculty deploying the lessons in their courses can use the PowerPoint of any of the lessons for in-person or synchronous delivery; or opt to assign the HTML version of any of the module lessons for asynchronous delivery. Once the module is imported into their course section(s), faculty choose the number of lessons and specific assessments.

As indicated above, “Critical Thinking in the Age of Misinformation” is a single module that includes six lessons. The decision to create a single module was based on the goal of an efficient and simplified module easily integrated into an existing course. To maintain organizational simplicity, the module items in each lesson include the lesson content, the conclusion and next steps, and the different assessments for instructors to choose from.

To support learning, the lessons are written to include an instructor voice to guide the students through the content, a lesson objective, a “call to action”, a highlights of important concepts and key terms, a practice activity, and a “want to learn more” section listing additional resources.
The content of the lesson is delivered using text and short multimedia resources. The inclusion of practice activities at the end of each lesson, which are surveys with detailed feedback, allows students to practice critical thinking, media literacy skills, recall of those skills and key concepts. In support of learning, content is interactive, professionally designed, visually appealing and includes professional educational resources. For asynchronous delivery of the module, HTML design templates were used to create content for the university learning management system (Desire to Learn) to convey the same basic text, graphics, and themes used in the PowerPoint versions of each lesson. This also allowed for a seamless transition in look and feel from HTML to PowerPoint.

In addition to content development, project assessment work to date includes student attitudes and faculty feedback for first- and second-year core courses across the liberal arts and sciences that adopted the module. Student surveys show:

- a rise in the number of students that view the need to apply critical thinking and media literacy skills as important,
- an increased student perception of being better equipped to use critical thinking and media literacy skills, and
- a student urgency to use these skills more often in their personal and professional lives than they did before completing the module.

We hope to see the positive impacts of this resource at other schools throughout the US and the world. If you are interested in creating something like this at your home institution, feel free to contact us for additional information on best practices or for more details of this project.

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COLORING WITHIN (AND SOMETIMES OUTSIDE) THE LINES: TEACHING GERRYMANDERING AND REDISTRICTING

By Nick Kapoor (nicholas.kapoor@fairfield.edu)

My fascination with my two undergraduate majors, political science and mathematics, has only grown since graduating from Sacred Heart University in 2011. Gerrymandering and redistricting perfectly blend these two disciplines and thus remain especially interesting to me. In 2011, I investigated how my home state of Connecticut redistricts, wrote up some remarks, and testified in front of the General Assembly’s Redistricting Committee. As I worked through graduate programs in math and political science and began teaching in the Mathematics Department at Fairfield University, teaching a course on this topic felt like a natural fit, but out of reach. There is an overabundance of service courses, and more senior faculty taught and created electives. However, when the Honors Program asked for interdisciplinary course ideas, I jumped at the chance. With the enthusiastic support of my department chair and a leap of faith from the Honors co-directors, my course on gerrymandering and redistricting was on the schedule for Spring 2022.

To prepare the class, I reached out to someone with experience teaching a gerrymandering course. Dr. Kyle Evans, an Assistant Professor in the Math Department at Trinity College and classmate, has taught redistricting and gerrymandering to undergraduates for several years. He met with me several times. Dr. Evans provided suggested texts, topic outlines, and sample homework assignments. He has framed his course so that I was able to take his course shell and incorporate some of my own ideas and readings to have a successful launch.

When I teach a course for the first time, it is an experiment, so I keep a teaching journal to guide me for the next time. After each class session, I journal for five or ten minutes to reflect on what the class discussed, what went right and wrong, and what can be improved.

Teaching the Class

The course starts with an overview of gerrymandering by viewing *Gerrymandering: The Documentary* and a broad, albeit somewhat biased, *John Oliver clip*. Students then go through a simplified redistricting simulation by playing

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5 https://www.amazon.com/Gerrymandering-Dave-Aronberg/dp/B007S63FFG
6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-4dI1maodQ&t=1s
MapMaker: The Board Game⁷, as shown in the picture. This game is a great way to start thinking about the decisions that mapmakers have to make. Following a broad introduction to redistricting and gerrymandering, we dive deeper into each aspect of the content. Class sessions include: The U.S. Census and Apportionment, State Redistricting Processes, Population Deviation, Racial Gerrymandering, Prison Gerrymandering, Compactness, the Efficiency Gap, Partisan Gerrymandering, “Fair” Districts, Monte Carlo and Markov Chain Methods, and how we can make redistricting better. Each class session includes active learning, simulations, and students engaged in their learning as much as possible. Activities follow mini-lectures where students apply what they learned.

There are several quantitative and qualitative homework assignments throughout the semester. Quantitatively, students practice finding the Efficiency Gap in a plan or calculating the Reock score of a particular district. Qualitatively, students research court cases that affect gerrymandering in the different states, or read the amicus brief of Mathematicians in Ruch v. Common Cause to analyze its arguments, and thread it through course material. The homework assignments reinforce the course content and build foundational skills for students to use in future projects.

Whenever I teach a political science course, I work hard to bring in guest speakers. This past semester, my class was joined by four incredible speakers. Connecticut Speaker of the House Matt Ritter (D-Hartford) and Connecticut House Democrats Legislative Process Manager Jeff Greenfield joined us to speak about being in the “room where it happens.” The Speaker served on the Connecticut Redistricting Commission last year and explained in great detail the particulars that go into drawing each and every line. The Connecticut League of Women Voters Redistricting Director, Joan Twiggs, also joined us to discuss what it is like to advocate for redistricting reform from the interest group perspective. And finally, our Congressman, Jim Himes (D-CT), joined us to describe his views on gerrymandering and how it affects the type of colleagues he works with daily. Overall, the students regarded the guest speaker portion of the course highly.

⁷ https://www.amazon.com/Lafair-Family-Games-Mapmaker-Gerrymandering/dp/B07PV128NJ/ref=sr_1_1?crid=12YFHDIVV6VR&keywords=mapmaker+the+board+game&qid=1655175437&sprefix=map+maker+the+boa rd+game&qid=1655175437&sr=8-1
Throughout the course, we build towards two significant projects: a map portfolio and a final project. We utilize the free and genuinely superb internet-based Dave’s Redistricting Application (DRA), as shown at left. This is an exceptional tool that allows anyone to draw their own Congressional or state legislative maps. The class of twenty is broken down into four teams of five. Those teams are further divided into one group of two and another of three. Each small group produces a portfolio of different Congressional maps, including a partisan gerrymander and a “fair” map – however each group defines fair – for a particular state assigned by the instructor. The large team of five is tasked with being an independent consulting group to a state legislature. They draw several maps and recommend to the state legislature, which map to adopt for their 2022 – 2032 Congressional seats. These comprehensive reports are presented to the class at the end of the semester. The students took to this project with sincere enthusiasm and showed how much they had genuinely learned in one short semester around what could be a remarkably obscure topic.

**Student Feedback**

After the semester concluded, I solicited feedback from five students about the course with writing this article in mind. Some of their feedback is below.

- **Question 1:** Did you know anything about gerrymandering before our class? Three answered “a bit,” one – a Politics major – answered “a lot,” and one answered “nothing.” Student 2 said, “Getting into the actual process of gerrymandering taught me more than I have ever learned in a politics class before.”
- **Question 2:** Knowing what you know now, would you retake the class? This question had five resounding yes answers. Student 3 said, “Redistricting and gerrymandering are not discussed enough for having such an outsized impact on our democracy.” Student 4 said, “Each class we learned how much goes into a process that seems very simple on the surface.”
- **Question 3:** What will you remember about our class in 10 years? Student 1 discussed knowing how the U.S. Census works and its impact on how federal funds and so many other things are distributed based on this process that only happens once every ten years. Also, “Gerrymandering affects our democracy in ways we cannot imagine.” Student 5 said, “there is no way to make everyone happy when a map is redrawn.”
- **Question 4:** Is there merit in doing an entire class on gerrymandering and redistricting? Student 1 said, “Yes, but I believe that the focus should shift away from students redistricting as much as we did and focus more

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8 https://davesredistricting.org/maps#home
significance it has on society and how our political system currently looks.” Student 1 further indicated that more recent research on gerrymandering would have added great context to the class. Student 3 said, “Include how other countries redistrict and compare to America – that would have been fascinating!”

- Question 5: What was your favorite part (or parts) of the class? Student 2 said drawing the maps was their favorite part, “I started drawing maps for fun outside of the classroom because I thought the process was so fascinating!” Student 5 also enjoyed drawing their maps, “This made us put into practice everything that we had learned throughout the semester and forced us to make the same tough decisions that real map makers have to make.”

- Question 6: What was your least favorite part (or parts) of the class? Student 1 said, “I felt the projects were repetitive. I strongly believe that one project would have sufficed, and we could have focused more on the social and political consequences of gerrymandering.” Students 2 and 3 emphasized that the mathematical aspects of the course were difficult to understand without some pertinent background in math and statistics.

Conclusion

Is teaching an entire course on redistricting and gerrymandering a wise use of time? Yes! Outside of academia and the general populace every ten years, this process is a little talked about phenomenon in our government because it happens so infrequently and seems esoterically technical. However, it can significantly impact who we elect to our state legislatures, U.S. House of Representatives, and several federal funding formulas. This course allows students to learn about the theory of gerrymandering and to apply what they learned to create something new. I am beyond excited to teach this in the future and welcome comments and feedback to make it stronger. I’m also happy to share materials with anyone interested.

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TEACHING AND LEARNING IMMIGRATION POLITICS AS A LOCAL ISSUE

By Kelly Bauer (kbauer@nebrwesleyan.edu) and Hyeonju Wang (wan01023@umn.edu)

Teaching immigration politics in Nebraska is challenging. While there is a significant immigrant community, there are deep public opinion divisions (Vogt et al. 2019, see also Bauer et al 2021, Ceballos and Yakushko 2014, Chávez 2009, Gouveia et al. 2005). Reflection papers assigned on Day 1 are bimodal. Either students see immigration politics from a distance, perhaps sharing some curiosities about national headlines but quickly highlighting their distance to the conversation by highlighting they are in the class to learn (and many share they have never met an immigrant), or students have intimate first or second-hand experiences with immigration. How can the classroom be a space for dialogue and learning across this often-overwhelming variation in students’ proximity to immigration politics? In this essay, we highlight how starting the class with local immigration events and conversations can bridge these gaps in proximity to immigration politics to facilitate collective conversation and learning.

The class starts with case studies of key immigration conversations and current events in recent Nebraska history: Fremont housing ordinance debates, COVID-19 at meatpacking plants, ICE raids at an O’Neill tomato farms, local 287g agreements, recent refugee arrivals, and an ACLU wrongful detention case. While many students think that ICE raids, for example, happen elsewhere, these cases challenge students’ frames of reference. Students also spend a class period grouped up based on the size of the community they grew up in to interrogate how identity formation happened in that community. Who were the out groups in their communities, and how was that implemented and maintained? How did immigration impact these processes? This class period is profound, as students draw on their local expertise, and observe similar patterns of individual and group identity formation in neighboring or similar towns. Through this local focus, students started to think about immigration as a political phenomenon impacting their communities, and to interrogate both narratives of immigration they grew up with and the potential disconnects between national and local narratives of immigration.

This local focus makes several pedagogical moves. Structuring the class around local narratives requires students to learn from their own narratives, as well as those of their classmates and first-person course materials, challenging students’

Supplemental materials (syllabus, readings, discussion questions, reflection prompts) available here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Dyj4IClsPEIFes5VCd05h5ezdB8k1FgE4LTB8qnfiY/edit?usp=sharing
thinking and facilitating empathic scaffolding with future content mapping on prior experiences (Bauer & Clancy, 2018). These first person and local narratives reflect a critical raced-gendered epistemology and pedagogy that recognizes students as holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal 2002, Rodriguez 2008). First-person, narrative, and local course content structures whose voices should be learned from and challenges students’ ability to objectify a perceived “other” (Chaisson 2005). Ultimately, this approach prioritizes learning from and with a particular group of students in a particular place.

The local focus on immigration allowed students to engage in a more dynamic conversation with each other, particularly during the discussion groups based on community size. These discussion groups shifted the conversation away from party politics or affiliations related to immigration, softening preconceived stances on national level immigration politics. This changed the conversation dynamics from “listen and respond” (in agreement or disagreement) to “listen and learn.” In prior conversations, the high-tension immigration politics often led students to listen and respond with varying opinions, sometimes leading to quick dismissal of a student’s opinion based on their politics. When discussing immigration in the context of specific communities, students listened with curiosity and asked follow-up questions because each students’ lived experience varied, creating opportunities for learning from each other. Immigration became a topic where students shared which aspects of immigration politics were visible in the communities they grew up in. From these discussions, students made observations about their communities through comparing and identifying which parts of immigration politics were invisible (or less visible) in their communities.

This content and these discussion groups led to two outcomes. First, it bridged differences between students’ proximity to and language about immigration at the start of the class. Within the discussion groups based on community sizes, the conversations were less based on othering immigrants with references of “they” or collectivizing language like “illegal.” Rather, the conversations shifted to “in my school” or “this person I know.” For example, a student would share that “in my school” there was an ELL class where immigrant and refugee students spent parts of their days learning English. Not only did this bridge a proximity gap on the topic of immigration, but the students’ shift in language removed some of the dehumanizing language that was once more frequent in the classroom, particularly during conversations surrounding national headlines where it was easier to reference the “other.” Second, by identifying in conversation which aspects of immigration politics were visible or invisible in our students’ communities, the class started to see the similarities and disconnects between lived, local experiences and national headlines.
Certainly, there are challenges to this approach that faculty should carefully consider. It takes a lot of time to curate course content of local immigration politics. There are rich resources from NGOs, podcasts, newspapers, dissertation research, and some academic articles, but finding these materials and translating them into a coherent, accessible course schedule is challenging. These choices come through in evaluations. Local immigration politics are locally and nationally politicized in different ways at different points in time; students enter the classroom with a range of understandings and narratives (or lack of) about local events, and these shifts complicate class planning. Students have perceived the course’s early focus on local conversations to distance us from national policy debates and events, and sometimes share that they wish we had spent more time on these national conversations and policies. This is particularly true at times when national immigration politics catches students’ attention, leading to less enthusiasm for local conversations. Some students have observed that this focus allows students to learn politically correct language from the local conversations, which can also limit the scope of national politics conversations. But, asking students to engage with national debates, without a prior interrogation of individual and collective identity politics, risks legitimizing problematic and dehumanizing rhetoric and policies that impact many in the class.

How can other political science instructors integrate local politics into their courses about topics like immigration? Small changes have made a big difference in our course, such as asking students to write day 1 and end-of-semester reflections on their thinking about both national and local immigration politics. In addition to providing the instructor insight into students’ experiences that might integrate into the classroom, students are often surprised by their day 1 writing at the end of the semester. Adding in 1 or 2 early class periods or discussions on local immigration politics, or add a local current event into other course content may also be effective, small changes. This is particularly powerful when students generate some of this content based on their interests and experiences, and are able to develop and share their expertise with the class.

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Kelly Bauer is an assistant professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Heyonju Wang was an undergraduate in the Class of 2019 at Nebraska Wesleyan University and is an incoming Ph.D. student at the University of Minnesota.
SUPPORTING STUDENT-ATHLETES

By Quinn Bornstein (qmb3@georgetown.edu)

My proudest teaching moment was when two students approached me after our last discussion section of the fall semester and thanked me for being so supportive of them as student-athletes. They said their experience in my class was unique; their previous teachers were difficult when they asked for accommodations. I was pleased that my message on the first day of class, that I had been a student-athlete myself and was therefore available as a resource, resonated with them.

I understand that sometimes practice runs late, sometimes because of visiting the athletic trainer, or, most concerning of all, waiting for the doctor to explain the results of an x-ray—a faint fracture line can lead to a season of aqua jogging in the pool.

This was my experience as an undergraduate. I competed as a long-distance runner for Brown University. For four years I ran cross-country in the fall, indoor track in the winter, outdoor track in the spring, and rigorous summer training. While thankfully my professors were for the most part understanding of my dual commitments to athletics and academics, not all my teammates were as lucky. Many had to take final exams in hotel rooms, proctored by our coach, on the night before a fall or spring conference meet, their nerves already stretched to breaking point.

Student-athletes face unique challenges during their undergraduate experiences. While the term student-athlete seems to embody an individual who can merge their academic and athletic lives into one (notably putting academics first, rather than being an athlete-student), these two lives are often at odds with each other. To be a successful athlete, it is important to eat balanced meals, get a full night’s sleep, spend many hours a week doing prehab (stretches and exercises to prevent injury and strengthen weaknesses) and rehab (the same, but for injury recovery), and allow your body to rest in between periods of exertion. To be a successful college student, on the other hand, involves a contradictory set of expectations: pulling all-nighters at the library, staying up late socializing or eating fried food at the college snack bar, getting involved in extracurricular clubs, or securing internships.

The coronavirus pandemic has compounded these concerns – a student-athlete contemplating a night out the week before a big game must not only weigh the pros and cons of being social with getting rest but is also concerned that a COVID-19 diagnosis could take them out of the line-up or hamper their season.

While universities have academic advisors to help athletes who are struggling to keep their grades up, this is not enough. It is important for faculty and graduate teaching assistants to understand the unique needs of student-athletes. Educators must be compassionate in helping these students come up with plans to do well in their classes.
In one instance, a student-athlete in my class emailed me shortly before an evening discussion section to say that his practice had run late and, with a short window of time until the dining hall closed, he was deciding whether to attend class or eat dinner. I advised him on the latter, knowing the importance of refueling quickly after exercise to allow the body to recover, and that hungry students have a hard time focusing and therefore do not learn. I told him that he could make up his discussion section participation points by emailing me a one-page Word document on his thoughts on the previous week’s reading. This was a policy I set out for all students at the beginning of the semester, not wanting students with potential coronavirus symptoms to attend class anyway out of a fear of getting a bad class participation grade. The policy worked well, and it demonstrated that there are ways we can support students—those with colds, family obligations, or a coach who talks for so long at practice that you miss dinner—while not letting them off the hook in terms of their academic obligations. However, I fear that an educator who did not personally understand the student-athlete experience would have been less lenient than I and would have compelled the student to attend class on an empty stomach.

If educators are not understanding of student-athletes’ obligations, it could increase the gulf between athletes and non-athletes. A recent survey of college student-athletes found that non-student-athletes perceive their student-athlete peers as “a distinct and privileged group who prioritizes their athletic participation over academic performance with institutional support and resources not available to nonathlete students, suggesting that student-athletes are categorized as an outgroup by students” (Yukhymenko-Lescroart 2022, 24).

Some of these students may be aware of statistics, such as from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation 2010 College Sports Project, which showed that student-athletes at Division III schools had lower GPAs than their non-athlete peers. The starkest disparity was for male recruited athletes, meaning those who were sought out by college coaches while they were still in high school (Rampbell 2010). While these results are illustrative, particularly the performance difference by gender (there is a far greater gap between male athlete and non-athlete performance compared to female), they are also limited. Division III schools do not offer scholarships, unlike in NCAA Divisions I (apart from the Ivy League) and II (NCAA 2022). DI and DII students may therefore have different priorities, such as a concern that quitting a sports team could mean losing out on a college education they couldn’t afford without a scholarship. More, and more recent, research is needed on the motivations, needs, and academic performance of student-athletes.

In political science, internships on the Hill or in local Congressional offices, or writing for a campus political magazine, may be unavailable to student-athletes whose practice obligations conflict with these job’s hours, or who cannot take a semester away from their sport to work on a campaign or live in Washington D.C. despite the career benefits down the road. We can do more as political science educators to identify opportunities for students whose time outside the classroom is
not fully their own—whether these obligations are due to athletic or other obligations. One upside of the pandemic is that virtual internships with flexible hours could open the application field to those who must remain close to campus.

A study by Brecht and Burnett examined tactics for best supporting DI student-athletes in their first year of college. They found that the strongest indicator of retention, meaning staying enrolled in college, was having a good high school GPA. While this recommendation is likely not unique to student-athletes, it can help athletic advisors seek out those students who, based on their high school experiences, may need more assistance transitioning to college.

The authors also found that self-confidence was an important characteristic for success and retention. They conclude, “giving students opportunities to learn the necessary skills to improve classroom performance may likewise increase their self-confidence, which in turn positively affects their academic performance” (Brecht and Burnett 2019: 56). I would add that self-confidence also positively affects athletic performance, thus increasing self-confidence, thus improving academic achievement, and so on.

Therefore, as we discuss the ways in which we can support students after more than two years of pandemic-induced stress and virtual or hybrid schooling, we must keep in mind the commitments that many students face outside the classroom. How best can we support them and give them the self-confidence to achieve both in the classroom and on the field? It may be as small a gesture as permitting a student-athlete to eat an after-practice snack in class, flagging a political internship with flexible hours, or asking them how their game went last week.

**References**


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A REFLECTION ON TEACHING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION USING TIKTOK

By Rachael Houston (houston@tcu.edu)

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I taught a hybrid version of an introductory American politics course last year. The class met in-person on Fridays for an hour and a half, but was otherwise online. This format made it particularly difficult to keep the course in a lecture style. Who wants to listen to a lecture on a Friday afternoon, or remember a Friday lecture to complete course material for the following week? Because of this, I restructured the course and made Fridays more “hands on” for the students. I wanted them to apply concepts they learned through the online lectures for in-class activities. This meant that the semester included many fun assignments: deliberative dialogues, Twitter fights, movie screenings, letters to representatives, and—my personal favorite—TikTok videos.

My course dedicated a week to discussing political participation, campaigns, and elections. Oftentimes, students think of political participation only as voting, so I spent this week really trying to convince them that they could participate through other means as well. I thought an assignment that reinforced this point would be perfect. Before our Friday class, I anonymously polled students through our online learning portal about their access to a cell phone and TikTok. I did this to ensure that I would not exclude any student who lacked access. I placed students randomly into groups of two to three, ensuring that at least one person in each group had a cell phone and access to TikTok.

Once I placed students into these groups, I delivered a quick 5-minute lecture highlighting what I had emphasized in the online lecture that week: That participation does not mean voting exclusively. We then spent 15 minutes going through The New York Times’ “How to Participate in Politics” article, which highlights several ways students can make their voices heard outside of voting. Once we reviewed and discussed the article, I presented the assignment instructions. I asked students to record a quick video (2 minutes maximum) on TikTok. The video had to: (1) include a message about why everyone should participate in politics, (2) identify one form of participation, and (3) explain a set of “best practices” to maximize the effectiveness of the form of participation they chose with their partner(s). Additionally, students were tasked within their groups with assigning at least one person to film and one person to be on camera. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2014) refer to this as positive interdependence and argue that this type of cooperative learning tends to result in learners promoting each other’s success.

I also let them know that we would have a movie screening of all their TikTok videos once they returned to the classroom. The movie screening had a contest element to it: Students could anonymously vote through a Google Form I created for their favorite Tik Tok video (but couldn’t vote for themselves) and the winners

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got bragging rights for the rest of the semester. This contest structure motivated them, as they knew that their small group members needed them to win the votes of the class (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 2014).

After I explained the instructions and contest, I told students to leave the classroom and record their videos outside. The catch, however, is that they only had 30 minutes to record the videos from start to finish with their partners. This is one of the many reasons why I decided to use TikTok. TikTok videos are very quick – about 50% of TikTok users said they found videos longer than one minute to be “stressful.” By using a platform that demands quick videos in combination with 30 minutes running down on the clock, students had to quickly think about the most efficient way to respond to all three prompts.

When the students came back into class, each group emailed me their TikTok video. The platform is convenient because users do not have to post their content to the platform itself. TikTok has a draft function where users download videos that they make to their phone without uploading the videos to TikTok. It was very easy for students to download their videos to their phones and send them to me via email, especially because they were only a couple minutes long at most.

While we were watching the videos in random order, I was pleasantly surprised to see how excited the students were to watch each other’s videos – and their own. They were laughing, clapping, and full of life. This was a great way to switch the classroom structure to one centered around the students. It was highly important for them to see each other’s work, as peer-to-peer learning in the classroom improves students’ conceptual understanding of a topic (Duncan 2005; Mazur 1997), bolsters student engagement (Lucas 2009), and encourages civic engagement in younger populations (Shea and Harris 2006).

The students covered many forms of political participation in their videos, including voting, writing letters to their representatives, protesting, and donating. Students heard from their peers about how to engage with these different methods of participation and how to do so effectively. This is particularly important, as many natural and field experiments have found that political participation is contagious within social circles (Gerber et al. 2008; Nickerson 2008; Klofstad 2010; Panagopoulos 2010). These videos were a way for students to hear from each other about these forms of participation, rather than hearing them from me (the teacher) exclusively.

As a teaching tool, TikTok was a perfect way to get many students interested in the course material. The platform itself allows students to connect pop culture to politics – and in this case pop culture to political participation. It might feel silly or out of place, but I found the benefits of TikTok’s educational use too great to ignore. As an example, in a trend this past year on TikTok, Gen Zers “canceled” Millennials’ sense of style in the form of skinny jeans. A group in my class took this

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10 See https://dot.la/tiktok-expands-max-video-length-2656809666.html.
trend and instead “canceled” people who did not feel the need to vote. Another trend was #fetapasta where a TikTok user showed themselves making a feta pasta using a few simple ingredients. A group in my class used this trend and instead showed how volunteering for a campaign only takes a few “simple ingredients.”

At the end of the movie screening, I pulled up the results of the Google Form and we all saw together which video won the votes of the class. I had the winners stand up and we gave them a round of applause. Once class ended, students were more lively than usual, with many of them sticking around to talk to each other. The assignment helped form new friendships in the classroom.

While the pandemic forced all of us to adjust our teaching, often for the worse, this experience was an outlier. The hybrid format forced me to try new hands-on approaches to teaching – and this included using TikTok. TikTok let me capture the attention of many students who were otherwise not interested in the course material, meet them where their interests lie, and enter their worlds. If you are on the fence about using TikTok or social media more broadly in your courses, I suggest you try it! The excitement I felt from my students during this assignment was contagious.

References


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*Rachael Houston received her Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Minnesota in 2022 and is an incoming assistant professor of American judicial politics at Texas Christian University*
ANNOUNCEMENTS

Correction: In the last edition of the PSE Educator newsletter, the Section President's Message mentioned two books launched at the Political Science Education section reception during the 2021 APSA conference, but omitted one of the books also launched by the section at the reception. The excluded book *Teaching Civic Engagement Globally* is edited by Elizabeth C. Matto, Alison Rios, Millett McCartney, Elizabeth A. Bennion, Alasdair Blair, Taiyi Sun, and Dawn Michelle Whitehead. It is available online as a PDF or EPUB. We apologize for the error.

APSA Teaching and Learning Conference 2023: The conference will take place February 10-12, 2023 in Baltimore, MD. Proposals are due on September 28, 2022, and the theme is “Re-Energizing Political Science Education: Innovations and New Opportunities.” More information available at https://connect.apsanet.org/tlc2023/call-for-proposals/

APSA Educate Highlight: In March 2022, APSA's Teaching & Learning program brought fifteen political science educators together to workshop the American Government and Politics undergraduate course. Their original materials are showcased next to related APSA resources in a special online collection: https://educate.apsanet.org/teaching-american-politics.

"Our symposium workshopped an Introduction to American Government course in which students are encouraged to see politics as something that requires their active participation." – Casey Dominguez (San Diego University) and Elizabeth Norell (Chattanooga State Community College), symposium co-facilitators

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

Submissions: Please send any article submissions or announcements for future newsletters to the editors at editor.pse.newsletter@gmail.com. Please include "PS Educator submission" in the subject line of your email, and include a short, two-sentence biographical statement. Research notes, reviews, and reflections are all welcome. Research notes in this newsletter should be considered as working papers and have not undergone peer review. 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. Please use APSA citation style for in-text citations and a list of references at the end of your submission. Research notes, reviews, and reflections should include in-text citations for relevant academic literature. The editors reserve the right to make minor corrections for style, clarity, readability, grammar, spelling, or factual errors.

11 https://web.apsanet.org/teachingcivicengagement/
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