

POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATOR

A Newsletter of the Political Science Education Section of the American Political Science Association

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[Message from the Section President](#) (pages 2-4)

The Teacher-Scholar

[Preparing Students for the 2024 Election: Voter Education & Engagement
Workshops for College Teachers](#)

by Elizabeth Bennion (pages 5-10)

Reflections

[A Critical Review of the APSA Presidential Task Force on Rethinking Political
Science Education](#)

by Matthew Stein, Alexandra Macias, and Jennifer De Maio (pages 11-15)

[Reintroducing and Reinforcing: Political Science Bootcamp for Graduate Students
in a Master of Public Administration Program](#)

by Amber Overholser and Sante Mastriana (pages 16-20)

Reflections on Developing Wicked Problem Solvers

by Paige Tan, Heather Keith, and Tay Keong Tan (pages 21-26)

[Teaching During Wartime: Institutional Adjustments with a Flexible Classroom
Teaching Approach](#)

by Niva Golan-Nadir (pages 27-33)

Lessons Learned from Online Students in a Conflict Zone

by Dale Mineshima-Lowe (pages 34-39)

[It's a Trap! Teaching Bureaucratic Politics with a Star Wars Simulation](#)

by Jen Spindel (pages 40-44)

[Using Non-Content-Related Quiz Questions to Build Rapport](#)

by Rebecca A. Glazier (pages 45-47)

[Using Reading Groups to Encourage Both Deeper and Broader Reading](#)

by Colin M. Brown (pages 48-54)

[Can Chatgpt and Crowdsourced Forecasting Help Students Think About International Relations? A New Class Assignment](#)

by Justin Robertson (pages 55-64)

[Considering Edtech in Political Science Teaching: Data Literacy, Privacy Rights, and the Role of Government in Regulation](#)

by Janet L. Donovan (pages 65-71)

[Political Science Exams in the Age of AI](#)

by Erik Ringmar (pages 72-75)

[Back Matter](#)

[Announcements, Copyright Policy, Submission Policy](#) (pages 76-77)

MESSAGE FROM THE SECTION PRESIDENT

As another spring semester comes to close, I want to reflect on our accomplishments and our future as a section.

Work on updating the mission statement for the section is ongoing.

I am proud to announce that two candidates proposed by the section will be on the ballot over the summer to serve on American Political Science Association Council: J. Cherie Strachan from the University of Akron (who was nominated by the section) and Julie Mueller from Southern Maine Community College (who was nominated by the section and by the APSA Status Committee on Community Colleges in the Profession). I encourage everyone to vote for both candidates to ensure the role of teaching-focused faculty in the APSA transition to a new Executive Director.

Please consider attending the Teaching and Learning Conference at APSA 2024 conference in Philadelphia and the upcoming standalone TLC (which the location and dates will be announced soon). The TLC at APSA conference offers an outstanding opportunity to work with your colleagues to advance the scholarship of

teaching and to build relationships for future projects. Last year at APSA in Los Angeles, we offered small travel grants to graduate students attending TLC at APSA and may continue that this year if the section can ensure the graduate students' attendance at the TLC. In the future, the section is considering working with APSA to waive the registration fee for graduate students attending the TLC and create a mechanism to ensure their attendance at the TLC and the section business meeting.

The section also hopes to expand our outreach to better serve the needs of faculty in teaching-centric institutions. The Executive Committee continues to discuss several initiatives to increase diversity within the section:

- We are looking to expand the TLC at APSA travel grants for graduate students, contingent faculty, community college faculty, and faculty with teaching-focused appointments.
- We are considering creating ad-hoc subcommittees within the section mirroring the APSA-wide status committee (for example, Women and Politics, New Immigrant, LGBTQ, Community College, etc.). The goal for ad-hoc subcommittees would not be to duplicate the work of others but to ensure these subcommittees remain teaching-centric. These subcommittees could issue white papers to air concerns specific to different faculty needs or specific to the pedagogy linked to teaching demographic-specific courses.
- One of the most interesting ideas percolating in the Executive Committee, discussed briefly at the section business meeting in Los Angeles, is the creation of micro-credentials for teaching and political science pedagogy. Micro-credentials could create criteria and a mechanism for issuing credentials for attending APSA short-courses and APSA/PSE co-sponsored Teaching Symposia, completing pre and post course online modules, attending a certain number of PSE panels, and/or attending the PSE business meeting. There are several questions remaining. How would we use APSA funds to pay section members for their labor to develop the curriculum and oversee the work? Can APSA host such

online modules and can we get some of them included in the APSA conference? How would costs be handled? How and in what form would credentials or certificates be awarded to ensure that PSE gets proper credit rather than just APSA?

Do you have any suggestions for these initiatives? What other issues should the Executive Committee consider?

It will soon be time to seek nominees for section leadership. I encourage you to consider a role in leadership. My colleagues on the Executive Committee are some of the most dedicated and thoughtful people that I know in the discipline. Our sole mission remains growing the section in a way that best serves our members. The service within the section will be noticed, valued, and rewarded.

Finally, I wish to recognize my good friend and former PSE President, Terry Gilmour from Midland College for her much-deserved award for teaching excellence. To others within the section who have also earned awards for their teaching and mentoring, you rightfully possess our admiration and our congratulations.

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The Teacher Scholar

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE 2024 ELECTION: VOTER EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS FOR COLLEGE TEACHERS

By Elizabeth A. Bennion (ebennion@iusb.edu)

In this edition of *The Teacher-Scholar*, I want to draw people's attention to a range of voter education and engagement workshops designed to prepare students for local, state, and national elections. All workshops were recorded and are available for free online allowing instructors to fit this training into their summer schedules. Workshop panelists are eager to hear from instructors nationwide and abroad who wish to ask questions or share ideas. Political Science Education members are encouraged to share these resources with instructors across the discipline, and in other disciplines, who are ready to play their part in preparing students to participate in the fall 2024 election.

Noting that the 2024 election season promises to be one of the most contentious in American history, with the divisions in communities and regions playing out on college campuses, the American Association of State Colleges (AASCU) developed the [Practicing American Democracy Series](#)¹ to prepare campuses to become sites of vibrant and healthy democracy where students become informed and engaged citizens who model open debate on difficult issues. The series was part of the long-term work of AASCU's [American Democracy Project](#)².

The goal of this non-partisan initiative was to encourage conversation, demonstrate best practices, and provide critical resources so that campuses can build capacity and a campus culture that encourages engagement in building a strong democracy (aascu.org).

The first set of workshops I wish to highlight are the [Voter Education and Voter Engagement workshops](#) hosted by AASCU during the Spring 2024 semester.

¹ <https://aascu.org/civic-global-engagement/american-democracy-project/practicing-democracy-series/>

² https://aascu.org/programs/?program_status=current&program_tax=american-democracy-project

Voter education is defined as building the knowledge, civic skills, and democratic values required to become engaged in democratic politics, both during and between election cycles. Workshops focused on best practices to build knowledge, skills, and democratic values using informational overviews, resource spotlights, and trainings designed to incorporate civics into curriculum and co-curriculum. Sessions were designed for faculty and staff who wish to incorporate election preparation, information literacy, deliberative dialogues, and issue-based discussions into their courses and campuswide programming.

Voter engagement encourages and supports peaceful and meaningful participation in elections within our communities. Sessions included strategies for building, implementing, and assessing campus voting plans and understanding legislation about voting on campuses. These workshops were designed for campus leaders who support student and community voting.

February's workshops, [available here³](#), were designed to prepare students for voter engagement and supported information literacy and free speech on campus. This included voter education workshops on "Combating Mis- and Disinformation," "Gamification of Information Literacy," and Free Speech on Campus" along with voter engagement workshops on "Strategies for Building a Campus Voter Initiative," "Funding Voter Initiatives on Campus," and "Using National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSVLE) Data to Assess Student Engagement in Democracy."

The workshops in March, [available here⁴](#), explored ways to cope with political polarization and enhance well-being on campus. These included voter education workshops on "Reducing Political Extremism on Campus," "How to Incorporate a Political Diagnostic in Your Work," and "Integrating Civic Awareness across Disciplines" as well as voter engagement workshops entitled "Know Your Ballot,"

³ <https://aascu.org/events/practicing-democracy-february/>

⁴ <https://aascu.org/events/practicing-democracy-march/>

“Assessing Learning Outcomes for Student Civic Fellowships,” and “Physical and Mental Health During Election Years.”

April’s workshops, [available here](#)⁵, focused on building campus-community ties and integrating voter education into the classroom. Voter education workshops included “Exploring the Impact of Political Ideology on Hot Topics,” “Including Deliberative Dialogues in the Classroom,” “Artificial Intelligence and the Election,” and “Ideas for Incorporating Voter Issues into the Classroom.” Voter engagement workshops including “Organizing Community Dialogues,” “Developing Engaged Students,” “Strengthening Campus-Community Voting Initiatives,” and “Maintaining a Positive Campus Climate During the 2024 Elections.”

As a panelist for the March “Know Your Ballot” webinar and the April “Ideas for Incorporating Voter Issues into the Classroom” webinars, I can attest to the wide range of strategies discussed in each webinar, allowing faculty to determine which ideas, tips, and techniques might work best for students on their own campuses. For more information about these workshops, including the speaker lineup and complete recording for each session, visit the [AASCU web site](#)⁶. If you are a member of a four-year state college and university, [contact AASCU](#)⁷ directly to learn about to get engaged in the American Democracy.

The second resource I wish to highlight for faculty from all universities is the American Political Science Association-sponsored webinar entitled “Preparing Students for the 2024 Election: Campus Engagement and Civic Education,” [available here](#)⁸. It was a pleasure to join Middle Tennessee State University Professor Sekou Franklin, Piedmont Valley Community College Professor Connie Jorgensen, Howard University Professor Marcus Board Jr., and Menlo College

⁵ <https://aascu.org/events/practicing-democracy-april/>

⁶ <https://aascu.org/civic-global-engagement/american-democracy-project/practicing-democracy-series/>

⁷ <https://aascu.org/civic-global-engagement/american-democracy-project/#contact>

⁸ <https://educate.apsanet.org/preparing-students-for-the-2024-election>

Professor (and Dean) Melissa Michelson as a panelist for this session moderated by University of Akron Professor J. Cherie Strachan.

While sharing a common academic discipline and commitment to student engagement in politics, the panelists represented a wide variety of backgrounds, approaches, and institution types. All panelists noted the importance of engaging students and community partners in get-out-the-vote efforts, and noted ways to integrate voter registration, education, and mobilization work into all aspects of faculty life including teaching, research, and service. Panelists also stressed the importance of helping students understand the connection between elections and the issue they care most about.

Panelists discuss the skills that students need today, including how to advocate for themselves and how to navigate a world in which fake news travels faster than accurate news and conspiracy theories go viral. They further discussed the importance of understanding that the language of “civic engagement” and “civil dialogue” might alienate some students interested in political activism and direct action—and the more general importance of recognizing that each campus has different students and operates in a different political context, legal framework, and community, necessitating unique approaches to voter outreach that students can help craft. Finally, panelists stressed the importance of providing faculty with resources and recognition for their work and suggested ways that campuses and professional associations like the American Political Science Association can support this work.

Among the highlights:

- Elizabeth Bennion noted that work-study and for-credit student internships were at the heart of Indiana University South Bend’s robust and comprehensive semester-long voter registration, education, and mobilization activities. This includes staffed and unstaffed voter registration tables, class presentations, announcements on social media and Canvas, campuswide

emails, debate watch parties, parades to the polls, issue-based pizza and politics sessions, live candidate forums and a non-partisan online voter guide completed in partnership with the local League of Women Voters and South Bend Tribune.

- Marcus Borg noted his work with The Political Science Society—a student organizations representing over 1,000 political science majors on their get-out-the-vote network. Howard University also hired Stacey Abrams as an endowed chair of race and politics, allowing her to draw upon her national experience with voter mobilization when hosting events for students. The campus also partners with community groups, including Black Girls Vote, compiles a Black Voter Report, and uses Howard University TV to broadcast a Before You Vote program.
- Sekou Franklin also stressed the importance of community groups for Middle Tennessee State University, noting his work with Free to Vote Coalition and NAACP, focused on voting rights and voter restoration. He also noted the importance of integrating the work into teaching and research, noting the work his courses and students have done with voter registration, voter protection, and voting rights, and some research and writing he is doing on the impact of the vote on Black Americans, with focus on rules and regulations in the American bureaucracy.
- Connie Jorgenson stressed the importance of their campus voter guide, created by political science and journalism students as an active learning project. She noted the active involvement of the Honors Society and Student Government Association in planning get-out-the-vote parties and other election-related programming, attended by students, candidates, and local elected officials.
- Melissa Michelson highlighted the importance of context in determining what work is needed on a particular campus. Menlo College is in California where

state laws make it easy for students. Students have an early voting and Election Day polling place on campus and no pre-registration is required. The major goal of get-out-the-vote champions at Menlo College is getting students to want to vote and convincing them that it is important. They do this by helping students connect the issues they care about with local, state, and national races on the ballot.

Political scientists at all types of institution can also learn more about the resources necessary to support campus-specific voter education and engagement programming by exploring the resources linked to each online webinar or contacting me directly at ebennion@iu.edu.

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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE APSA PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON RETHINKING POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

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On the same day we presented our research at the 2023 American Political Science Association meeting, we attended a roundtable discussion of findings from the 2020-2022 APSA Presidential Task Force on Rethinking Political Science Education. This task force was directed to examine multiple areas of undergraduate and graduate education in political science. Given the overlap between our research on graduate education in political science and the focus of the task force, we were extremely interested in what the final report of the APSA Presidential Task Force, 2024 would say, especially with respect to its recommendations. After reading the report, we were prompted to write this response to start a discussion about rethinking graduate education in political science.

The Executive Summary of the report indicates its reliance on “the scholarship of the last two decades” to “examine best practices and make recommendations for departments as they reconsider their own programs and curriculum” (2024, 4). The undergraduate program portion of the report referred repeatedly to the Wahlke Report (1991), which was described as the “last disciplinary statement on the undergraduate curriculum” (2024: 13). Referencing this 1991 report quite often, the discussion incorporates a variety of scholarly works focused on undergraduate education leading to recommendations in terms of curriculum content learning objectives, skill learning objectives, and value learning objectives. The undergraduate portion of the report then concludes with a list of best practices for undergraduate education in political science.

The graduate portion of the 2024 report is very different. In 2002, the APSA council approved a motion by then-president Theda Skocpol to establish a task force on graduate education in political science. A reference to the findings of this earlier task force was listed, but not discussed, in the 2024 report. Given the 2024 task

force's assertion that "scholarship on Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is much less developed at the graduate than undergraduate level" (2024, 30). It seemed odd that the findings of a previous task force on graduate education was not used as a starting point for this committee to "rethink graduate education." Instead, the report references the findings from a 2022 APSA survey of 189 department chairs to discuss what it calls 'areas of tension' in PhD programs (2024, 31). Without knowing the types of departments these chairs represented (e.g. R1, R2, community colleges) or all of the questions that were asked on the survey, it is not entirely clear how or why the task force chose the specific "areas of tensions" it focused on. That aside, the report leaves us with more questions about how the task force rethought graduate education. We will focus on three areas of the report which we found especially concerning.

With respect to doctoral student teaching training, many of the report's findings are neither new nor unsurprising, as the equilibrium between research preparation and pedagogical training has long tilted towards the former (Ishiyama, Miles and Balarezo 2010, Diehl 2021). The report duly notes the dearth of mandatory pedagogical coursework for PhD students despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of colleges and universities are not primarily research-focused. However, the task force nearly absolves PhD-granting departments from the responsibility of ensuring that their doctoral students are receiving appropriate teaching training. The report explains that political science involves unique classroom challenges as we may cover politically polarized, sensitive topics, and professors may encourage student civic and political participation. Yet, rather than addressing the problem whereby departments may not "have experts in teaching itself or resources to offer a graduate course in pedagogy," the task force recommends: "At a minimum, Ph.D. students should be encouraged and ideally required to take advantage of campus-wide teaching and learning opportunities" (2024, 37). The report notes that a pedagogy course could be "required or at least strongly encouraged" (ibid). Without institutional incentives, it is unclear whether doctoral students pursue optional training as many doctoral departments already "encourage" students to pursue teaching training, with limited success (Stein 2023). Most departments do not

maintain records of which students (or how many) follow said advice but when interviewees provide estimates of how many doctoral students obtain optional pedagogical training, the percentages are paltry (ibid). For external, optional training to be a sufficient source of pedagogical knowledge, institutional incentives must exist. Absent incentivization—*requiring*, rather than merely *recommending* a training course—doctoral students are unlikely to receive formalized pedagogical knowledge and preparation.

With respect to preparation at the PhD level, one of the proposals made in the report is for departments to develop “pathways” within their PhD programs, thereby creating specialized tracks for those seeking careers at R1 (research-intensive) universities and those aiming for teaching, private sector, or public sector roles. While this approach could potentially provide more tailored support and mentoring for students based on their career goals, the report does not describe what these pathways would look like or how they would be distinguished. Moreover, given the resource gap that already exists between those seeking research, teaching or non-academic careers, it seems like this could significantly disadvantage those students who do not select the R1 pathway. R1 universities typically receive more research funding, and the allocation of resources, including mentorship and research opportunities, in Ph.D. programs could favor students on the R1 pathway. Faculty who may perceive the R1 path as more prestigious may be less interested in working with students on the non-R1 track, resulting in less training, publishing, and networking opportunities. The authors acknowledge that “incoming graduate students may not fully understand the discipline, the career opportunities they enjoy, or their own abilities,” (2024, 11) and may not have the flexibility they need to fully explore all their options. Perhaps even more importantly, systemic barriers in academia could result in students from underrepresented groups being more likely to choose non-R1 pathways. In addition, job candidates with a PhD who are hired for private or public sector positions are frequently recruited because of their research and data skills, thereby suggesting that there is an expectation of the type of training that all political science PhD students receive regardless of their career path.

If this task force proposal is adopted, graduate programs would need to balance specialization and inclusivity, being careful to address resource gaps and ensure that all students have access to comprehensive training and career development support. Clear guidelines and best practices should be developed to prevent marginalization and discrimination of students on the non-R1 pathway.

Perhaps most concerning, the report ignores the largest component of political science graduate education. In the introduction to the section on graduate education, the report immediately states that “this report does not discuss Master of Arts or Sciences programs in Political Science” (2024, 30). Explaining that “such programs...are highly diverse and require special assessment,” the report suggests that “a full assessment of masters’ curricula and best practices remains for a future Task Force” (2024, 30). Given that the last task force report on graduate education was issued twenty years ago (Beltran et al. 2005), it does not seem likely that such an examination will take place at any time in the near future. As part of our research on MA degrees we found that “between 1949 and 2021, the aggregate number of political science master’s degrees (MA) awarded in the United States was more than the aggregate number of political science Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees awarded; specifically, 119,008 MA degrees to 36,869 PhDs” (De Maio and Macias forthcoming). With almost three times as many MA degrees compared to PhD degrees granted, and a larger number of political science departments offering a master’s (as opposed to a doctorate) degree, a report on graduate education as it relates to master’s degrees program might actually have more resonance.

To reiterate, while we appreciate the efforts of the task force, we believe that this was a missed opportunity to publish a report that accurately reflects the state of political science education, and which contributes to an understanding of best practices. The concerns we have raised are not the sole issues we found with the report. For example, we remain concerned with the task force’s definition of political science, its silence on subfields, and its plausible exclusion of political theory as a subfield of political science graduate education. Again, we hope that

focusing on these initial issues will serve as a starting point for further dialogue about the current state of political science graduate education, and how we can contribute to a flourishing field of study.

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REINTRODUCING AND REINFORCING: POLITICAL SCIENCE BOOTCAMP FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN A MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

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Students often enter Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs with a desire to work and make positive change within the government sector, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, consulting firms, and other public service oriented professions. A basic review of most MPA programs will show that many, if not most, MPA programs do not have a course dedicated specifically to the American political system, requiring students to either come directly into the program with a strong understanding of U.S. political systems, government, and politics or to bring their knowledge levels up quickly through in-course exercises and self-directed learning. To accommodate a gap in learning we saw for many of our students, we partnered with Close Up Foundation to create an introductory set of modules that pairs the basics of our American political science system with opportunities to apply that knowledge to current affairs analysis. This partnership provides an opportunity for students to quickly become (re)oriented to political science concepts to start their Master of Public Administration program strong. To share how and why this bootcamp came to fruition we discuss our experience creating the Close Up/Southern Arkansas University Political Science Bootcamp for graduate students.

The MPA program at SAU accepts students to its online MPA degree on a rolling basis and offers an introductory (required) "Principles of Public Administration" course in both the Fall and Spring semesters. The student profile is diverse, with students ranging from those just finishing their undergraduate degree, to those working within the field, all the way to those students 60+ years old taking courses to fulfill a long-term goal. We accept and encourage student applicants from a wide variety of backgrounds, as public administration skills and concepts can be utilized across various sectors. Student undergraduate degrees include, but aren't limited to, criminal justice, public health, and social work. Political science students do

enter the program, but they are not the bulk of our student population. The diversity of backgrounds and personal goals are strengths given that we serve regional students, many of whom live and serve in rural communities and may be called upon not only to excel in their workplace but also to assume public leadership roles.

A specific challenge when serving our students has been the need to ensure student familiarity with the American political system. Regularly when I visit various undergraduate courses on campus to speak about public service, I ask students when they last took a political science course. The responses are somewhat grim, with most students not having taken a political science course since they were in high school. Arkansas requires students to take one half year course in civics at the high school level (State Policy - CivXNow n.d.) and it is not required at the undergraduate level within our institution. Instead, it is offered as one of the options to meet a student's social science requirements (Degrees and Programs | Academics | Southern Arkansas University n.d.). While we assumed in the past that students would pick up or remember various concepts as we move through the program, this didn't necessarily ensure strong participation from the very beginning. Essentially, students didn't know what they didn't know, so proactively approaching the knowledge gap is necessary.

Knowing that there may be a need for a review given that the majority of our students are not political science majors where we could pull from their undergraduate coursework, it seemed only logical to create a common set of modules related to the fundamentals of our political system, incorporating theory and practical application throughout. So, with the help of an internal grant, we contacted The Close Up Foundation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic education organization in Washington, D.C. for assistance in creating a "political science bootcamp" (hereafter bootcamp) for our students.

The Close Up Foundation has a stellar reputation throughout the nation and providing this kind of bootcamp is in keeping with Close Up's broader organizational

goals of increasing civic knowledge and preparing future voters for their role in our democracy. Close Up offers professional development training and resources for classroom educators and has worked in partnership with other civic education organizations and universities to promote civil discourse and active citizenship. Close Up is willing to partner with other institutions that may be interested.

Instead of requiring us to create an interactive program from scratch, Close Up staff adapted instructional materials from their Program for New Americans, a program aimed specifically at English Language Learners, migrant students, and first-generation immigrants to the United States. That program focuses on fundamental civic knowledge such as government structure and civil rights, with the goal of helping student build language skills and the content knowledge needed for U.S. citizenship exams.

The bootcamp consists of six separate modules: federalism, the bill of rights, the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, and democratic citizenship and citizen engagement. Pre and post-tests are required for students; we provide points for good-faith efforts for the tests as this encourages them to just take the tests and not focus on their scores. In each module students are required to finish two sections, each filled with keystone documents, videos, and links to appropriate news and journal articles. The first section provides a strong overview of the historical underpinnings and current thought on the given topic while the second section specifically requires students to apply their knowledge. For example, the second federalism section is a perfect opportunity to discuss marijuana policy as it relates to the relationships between the states and the federal government. While many are aware of some issues surrounding legalization, few use the language of federalism and understand the conflict as far as its connections to public administration (e.g., taxation, interstate commerce, equity of ownership, etc.).

The entire bootcamp lasts about 2 weeks and quickly (re)acquaints students to political science concepts so that we can build upon this foundational knowledge and move directly into focusing on public administration. Pre- and post-test scores

vary between small improvements (most often from political science or public administration undergraduate majors) and larger improvements, in the 30% range in increase in knowledge, for others. While those scores are obviously important, the bigger picture is that we have seen a dramatic increase in the strength of students throughout the entirety of the program as a result of the bootcamp. Students are better able to articulate the role of public administrators within the political system and examine various case studies with a stronger understanding of the role of the three branches and the intersection between various levels of government (and nonprofits). We can examine the role of the street-level bureaucrat and their connection to federal policies in more meaningful ways.

Conclusion

Ideally, everyone would have a baseline understanding of the American political system, though various studies reveal that is not the case (Clinton School of Public Service 2024; American Bar Association 2023; Maroni 2023). As we seek to welcome students into our program and ultimately strengthen our public administrators, we believe we are choosing a realistic means to address the decades long lack of civics education within secondary and higher education (Smith 2023). Our collaboration with Close Up Foundation provided us with a meaningful way to welcome students and allow all students to begin their MPA journey on solid footing.

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REFLECTIONS ON DEVELOPING WICKED PROBLEM SOLVERS

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In response to a book group on Paul Hanstedt's *Creating Wicked Students* (2018), Radford University faculty, staff, and students have created a campus-wide Wicked Initiative. The initiative encompasses co-curricular events, curriculum innovations, and even new student associations. It was built from the ground up, based on authentic interdisciplinary cooperation originating with the political science and philosophy departments.

The term "wicked problems" was first described in design and planning literature in the 1970s and has since been used to unpack complex public problems like climate change, food insecurity, and persistent inequality (Rittel and Webber 1973). Features of these complex and intractable problems include that they have varied descriptions based on stakeholder perspectives, no one solution, and no clear way to test solutions for success. There is also no ultimate solution to wicked problems, so the strategy is perhaps better described as problem-mitigation and adaptation, rather than problem-solving.

Hanstedt's *Creating Wicked Students* explains how dealing with wicked problems builds the precise skills students today need to develop—whatever their field—to deal with complexity, make themselves authorities, and go from analyzing problems to investigating solutions. Through our campus initiative in wicked problems, students develop their problem-solving, teamwork, oral presentation, and written communication skills. In addition, we see the growth of students' confidence in their abilities and hopefulness in the face of the many difficult problems our society faces.

From the book group, our Wicked Festival grew in Fall 2021. Starting from a core of classes in political science and philosophy in our College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences, the festival has grown to encompass multiple disciplines, such

as biology, criminal justice, design, economics, education, English, marketing, Spanish, and social work. Key offices in faculty development, undergraduate research, and civic engagement have provided crucial support.

Students work to solve tough public problems from their plethora of disciplinary perspectives and present their solutions at each semester's Wicked Festival. Students in political science have tackled extinction-level events, sought to quash growing White nationalism, fought terrorist groups at home and abroad, combatted campus-based sexual assault, and even strategized how to remove dictators from office. Philosophy students have explored reducing plastic use on campus, improving mental health initiatives in local schools, mitigating food insecurity on campus and in the community, and suggesting renewable energy solutions for campus.

The Wicked Festival is agnostic about *how* students solve their problems. Students in philosophy classes might use design thinking to tackle the climate crisis. This includes empathizing with stakeholders, defining the problem, ideating potential solutions, developing prototypes, and testing a solution. In our PHIL 115: Wicked Problems course, for example, students learn to understand the needs of stakeholders on campus or in the community or world (empathizing), explore the problems themselves and their intersections with other wicked problems (defining), and posit and assess potential solutions (ideation). While our first-year course experience doesn't always achieve prototypes or testing, students do make recommendations to leaders and policy makers about potential solutions to develop and test. In this case, our courses are service learning, both in direct volunteer service to the community and in developing recommendations and policy proposals to create more resilient and sustainable communities. A design thinking approach to wicked problems helps participants to develop skills, a transformative mindset, and collaborative relationships with partners and stakeholders (Lake, et.al., 2022).

Many political science classes use the [Harvard Kennedy School's Policy Analysis Exercise](https://www.hks.harvard.edu/node/316767/policy-analysis-exercise)⁹ approach to offer policy recommendations to a government or non-profit client. This involves problem definition, development of criteria, weighing alternatives according to the criteria, and arriving at recommendations. This year, biology joined the festival, with BIOL 112: Biology and Social Justice students using the tools of hard science to examine plant species' resilience to a drought- and heat-wracked world.

In 2023-2024, 725 students participated across the year's two festivals. Most students present at the festival through posters, but others have used short videos, readings of banned books, and audio clips. The key to success of the Wicked Festival, its secret sauce, is students talking to other students about their problems and solutions. Students have reported being amazed that they are taken seriously as problem solvers. They have remarked on how their confidence grows with each passing festival. Our faculty observes student problem solving improve in real time as they iterate their presentations and improve with each try.

In addition to studying problems and solutions, some classes in both political science and philosophy require students to take at least some actions in the real world to address their problem. Students in POSC 130: Changing the World have lobbied legislators, cleaned up campus, held consciousness-raising discussions, and contributed to the creation of momentum toward a campus-wide food security initiative. Students in PHIL 115: Wicked Problems have sent policy proposals to campus and community leaders, written a cookbook for foods found in local food banks, held awareness campaigns on campus, participated in local river clean-ups, and shared survey information with administrators regarding interest in campus environmental improvements. As we move forward, developing our channels to impact the real world, such as in a follow-on wicked problems experience like a higher-level wicked problems class, is a priority.

⁹ <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/node/316767/policy-analysis-exercise>

We are graduating this year our first students from what we call the “wicked generation,” students who have participated in many, if not most, of the Wicked Festivals across the last three years. Asked to sum up the skills they developed at Radford University in a political science careers class, the Wicked Festival was cited again and again by students. One student explained this skill development in their reflection from the class:

With these [Wicked Festival] projects, you take a major problem in the world and attempt to solve it. However, the problem needs to be hard to solve, it has to have complexity, or maybe the solution is a completely new idea. An example of a wicked problem was when the coronavirus first arrived in 2019. Once you get your topic you work in a team to work through the issue, and then at the end of the semester, you share your research at an event. You create a large poster to present at the event which usually has around 500 students and staff. So, throughout the project, you learn how to think critically, how to evaluate solutions, how to work well with a team, and how to present your findings. At this event, you dress professionally, and you work on your public speaking skills by repeatedly having different groups of people view your project. The first one can be challenging and from personal experience, it was by far the most nerve-wracking. However, I have now done four of them and will be doing a fifth this semester. Every time you do it you build on the skills and knowledge of the previous one. So, by the time I graduate, I can feel confident in these skills.

The Festival’s impact has been noticed by our University’s President as well. Interviewed by a student team at the spring 2024 Wicked Festival on the festival’s benefits, Dr. Bret Danilowicz responded: “It was so easy to see for the students who have taken a couple of Wicked Festival classes now, the way they speak, the way they present, the professionalism, the way they describe and present their posters . . . I’m seeing all these skills around employability from written communication to verbal communication to interpersonal skills to logic . . . critical thinking . . . you could just see it. [The students are] taking what they are learning and applying it to life” (Danilowicz, 2024).

In addition to the Wicked Festival, we have built curricular pieces to the Wicked Initiative as well. There is the Wicked Problems class in the Department of

Philosophy and Religion (mentioned above) that serves as an introductory course to the College Honors program. This course includes learning outcomes such as describing complex problems and possible approaches in the context of multiple social or ecological systems and working with a team effectively to posit and apply solutions to complex problems. Students in this often theme-based class (climate, inequality) work with campus and community partners to identify and research wicked problems and potential solutions. In their teams, they develop policy proposals and public presentations of their research, including at the Wicked Festival.

There is also a Wicked Problems minor combining courses in Philosophy, Religion, and Political Science. The minor combines six courses dealing with complex public problems, most participating in the Wicked Festival, with a view to creating students from a variety of campus disciplines who are adept and publicly engaged problem solvers.

One of the authors has created new student associations, the Wicked Society and Wicked Graduate Alliance, for undergraduate and graduate students to promote further discourse on wicked problems and their solutions on our campus. Wicked Society members conduct higher-level research on wicked problems and helped their faculty mentor demonstrate this pedagogy, along with Dr. Paul Hanstedt, author of *Creating Wicked Students*, at the United Nations Principles of Responsible Management Education Conference in Lisbon, Portugal in September 2023. Following their presentation, the Radford University student team was recognized by the conference organizers with “Outstanding Achievement” and “Meritorious Achievement” awards. Other accomplishments of the Society are creating the [Wicked Problems Toolkit](https://wickedproblems.org/)¹⁰, a repository of open educational resources to facilitate teaching of and research on wicked problem solving, and a [Wicked Problems Podcast](https://wickedproblems.org/podcast/)¹¹.

¹⁰ <https://f95203e3-bf39-423f-84b7-f106adb572e9.godaddysites.com/>

¹¹ <https://wickedproblems.org/podcast/>

The Wicked Initiative was seeded by one of the authors, our campus' Executive Director of Faculty Development, choosing Hanstedt's book for that faculty book group back in 2021. *Creating Wicked Students* inspired the faculty from the bottom up to develop the festival, the minor, and the student associations. We have watched our students thrive through the various facets of the Wicked Initiative. They are graduating more empowered and professionally ready. While some leaders were reluctant to embrace the term "wicked," our students love it, and we know the world is full of wicked problems waiting for them to solve.

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TEACHING DURING WARTIME: INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS WITH A FLEXIBLE CLASSROOM TEACHING APPROACH

By Niva Golan-Nadir (niva.golan@post.runi.ac.il)

During troublesome events, academia must adjust itself to new realities to be able to follow through the academic year, despite the challenges it faces. Yet, change is by no means an easy task for an institution, as political scientists know well from our own use of historical institutionalism. According to Pierson (2000), there are self-reinforcing processes in institutions that make their configurations, and hence their policies, difficult to change once a pattern has been established. In a path dependent process, the institution becomes increasingly stable, locked-in, and resistant to reversal (Mahoney 2000). One example that of a troublesome event that has interrupted path dependency is the Covid-19 pandemic. As we all have witnessed, during the teaching disruptions of the pandemic, academia had to alter teaching to online/hybrid/a-synchronic forms, while becoming more familiar with online techniques, apps, and software for virtual teaching (Brennan 2020; Stafford 2020; Stefanile 2020).

In this reflection, I would like to suggest that wartime is not much different from the Covid-19 pandemic era. In fact, many accommodations created during the pandemic were implemented again at once with the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza. This is because academia has faced similar challenges to the ones during the pandemic.

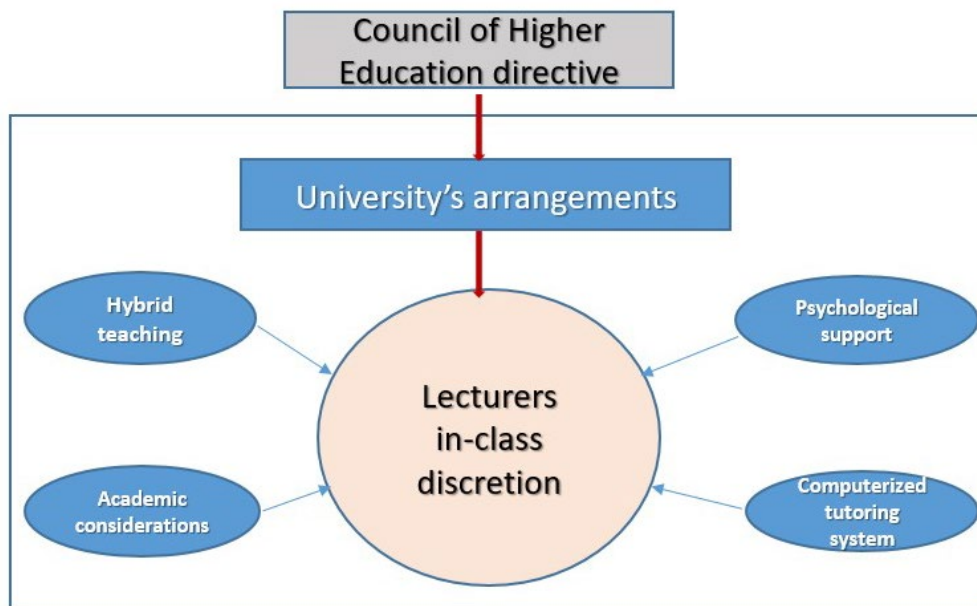
Recent literature on education during violent conflicts focuses on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It sheds light on the needs and challenges educators are facing during war. The latter includes students with psychological trauma, fear and stress, and low motivation to study (Lavrysh et al. 2022). The literature also highlights the importance of online teaching during the war. It argues that online teaching is suitable during the Russia-Ukraine war as it was during the Covid-19 lockdowns. They further argue that despite that teaching online is not ideal, it is a way to overcome the stress of war and the limitations it imposes on academia (Kostikova et al. 2023; Sytnykova et al. 2023).

I wish to offer some tangible lessons on what one should take away from teaching through troublesome events as war. I further argue that the discussion offered here can apply to varied internal societal cleavages, pandemics, or natural disasters as they contain similar experiences: teaching in diverse forms, psychological guidance to students, avoiding sensitive topics in the classroom, and accepting that students might not be engaged as we wish them to be.

Wartime adjustments – Institutional (university-level) and classroom-pedagogical (lecturer-level)

With the outbreak of the war and after roughly four weeks of postponing the 2023/2024 academic year, the Israeli Council for Higher Education published its decision not to cancel the entire Fall semester. Immediately and following the Council's general directive, universities began designing their new arrangements for all university's units, faculty, and students. As shown in Figure 1 below, the universities adjusted their arrangements to the Council's directive, and following, the lecturers implemented the university's guidelines, yet were still highly independent in managing their classrooms using their discretion.

Figure 1 – The war adjustments process



In the following sections, I draw on (1) what the university as an institution can do in a conflictual reality, that is beyond the classroom, and (2) what each lecturer can do. This is based upon my experience teaching at the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy at Reichman University in Israel during the conflict that broke out on October 7, 2023.

(1) Institutional adjustments

With the nationwide decision not to annul the first semester due to the war, the university was committed to facilitating a smooth integration into the academic year. The adjustments created at the university level make the general all-embracing framework. It touched on all the university's units and systems, faculty and varied populations of students, namely: international students, local students and reserve-duty students. Adjustments to the latter were gradual (linked to the time they are back from reserve-duty) and most significant. Three points were most serious in the university's adjustments: academic adjustments, reserve-duty student's special arrangements and psychological aid.

Academically, the university determined new and clear academic criteria that include the university's policy on teaching arrangements (e.g., moving to hybrid teaching, grade structure, number of classes, reduction in assignments, altering class exams to take-home exams/final assignments, academic support for reserve duty students, providing advice for lecturers on how to manage the classroom and psychological support for students). This was to be implemented at once.

Adjustments made for reserve-duty students were a critical component in the overall plan. These adjustments were made for students who did not commence the semester with their fellow students. The university has highlighted that it will do everything in its power to support them to the fullest extent possible. Practically, within several weeks, a comprehensive program was set up, including: assigning advisors to each school, who are available to assist reservists; encompassing video recordings of all on-campus lectures; offering extended lecturer's office hours; and

increasing the number of courses eligible for a binary pass/fail grade (the directive of the Council for Higher Education stipulates a maximum of 3 courses). It was also decided to grant extra time for exams for reservists.

The psychological aspect was also a core pillar point in the university's arrangements. It was clearly communicated that every student is entitled to contact the counseling services for support and/or psychological treatment, with a focus on returning to school after a reserve-duty period, adapting to an emergency routine, and dealing with the loss of friends and loved ones, as well as on issues related to studies/work/residence/relationships/health/addiction and more. Further, the student's government in cooperation with the Center for Learning Skills have created a joint physical learning space so that students can sit and study together, combining it with workshops on 'relaxation and learning skills in a complex reality.' Lecturers were also noted to mention these services to students they believe are in distress.

Though making a clear overall framework for lecturers, the latter were able to do much to make this challenging academic year work out. Here are several of my own impressions.

(2) Classroom pedagogical adjustments

Obviously, due to war-related tensions the classroom is even less homogeneous than before as students are not mentally as free as before for learning. Many of them experience emotions that consume mental energy that impair the ability to pay attention in class. Further, they face many security-related anxieties, feelings of guilt about "moving on" in life and in their studies while their reserve-duty friends did not, difficulty imagining a future, and fatigue from dealing with bereavement and pain. Based on the university's suggestions for best practices combined with my hands-on experience, I would like to offer some pedagogical adjustments for lecturers.

First, we must be highly patient towards students as we are not always clear on what is behind their behaviors/attitudes. Some know how to ask for our assistance, yet others might not. Students in my courses demonstrated different degrees of adjustments to the stressful situation, which at times challenged my judgement towards exaggerated requests for academic consideration (e.g., submission dates, attendance and more). I suggest meeting every request from an inclusive place, along with clarifying the rules and maintaining boundaries. Clarity, order and transparency are (always!) of great importance. At the same time, this calls for flexibility, namely, offering alternatives to fulfil the course obligations.

Second, much can be done to assist students in a classroom that includes hybrid teaching, while still creating a sense of normality. Specifically, during the war many international students at Reichman University have traveled back home, making hybrid teaching—as taught during COVID-19—a necessity. This has caused the class to include different groups with different mind-sets; an online group at their homes and an in-class group. Further, mentally some of them wanted to detach themselves from the difficulties that war has imposed upon them and concentrate in learning, while others were unable to detach, feeling anxious and struggling to maintain concentration. My experience has taught me that the best practice is simply constructing pedagogically diverse and highly interesting classes that touch on other case studies world-wide.

Practically, I have used international current affairs to exemplify the theory taught and demonstrated it using YouTube videos. I have also had students implement the material taught through group class assignments via Padlet. The activity took place at the same time in break-out rooms on Zoom, and was supervised by the TA. This way I was able to teach, while distracting the students from the conflictual reality and not leaving the Zoom group out of the loop. Realizing this will also assist lecturers not to be disappointed when their plan for a straightforward traditional class does not go as expected.

Third, the student's learning curve might change during irregular circumstances. This, from my viewpoint, has occurred both during the pandemic and during war. Realizing this, lecturers should try not to 'speed up' to meet their syllabi's goals, since the process of learning during a time of crisis is slower due to mental/emotional load that jeopardizes one's concentration and attention. Again, to make the class as normal as before, we must disconnect the lesson from the news, and create a safe space for learning. Naturally, if an alarm goes off during class, this will be hard to do, yet if the class goes as scheduled, some academic vacuum can be beneficial to all parties involved. This at times did motivate the students and speeded up the learning pace in my classes.

Finally, and in my view always applicable, we must pay attention to the political sensitivities of different groups in class. If (but only if) a conflict breaks out in class, we should acknowledge the explosiveness of the situation, but not allow offensive discourse to take over the subject of the lesson. As my teaching experience at Reichman University has taught me in the past decade, teaching politics to students from 94 countries around the globe, political dispute is always just "around the corner," and we should be prepared to handle it the best possible way. For example, when discussing the Russia-Ukraine war, or characterizing the Russian regime in a comparative politics class, with the presence of students from both states, lecturers must take on a highly professional approach, emphasizing the theoretical framework of analysis, rather than focusing on the conflict's sensitive lines. They should also use multiple case studies during the course and not focus on any one or a few, so no one feels "targeted."

Overall, the key takeaways that were offered here illustrate a professional cooperation between the university and its lecturers. Indeed, allowing the latter a discretionary domain to implement the institutional policy (along with the material resources to do so) is critical for overall institutional success and the well-being of the students. Best practices-wise, lessons from the pandemic era assisted universities to adjust much more quickly to the new challenges war has imposed on

it, despite not being completely identical in nature. This means that we must document and improve our knowledge of academic teaching at irregular times.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM ONLINE STUDENTS IN A CONFLICT ZONE

By Dale Mineshima-Lowe (d.mineshima-lowe@parami.edu.mm)

I've spent the past two plus years teaching synchronous online classes twice a week to undergraduate students in Myanmar (Burma). As a visiting faculty member, I have seen to-date, high levels of student engagement in their learning within this online classroom environment. However, in the Spring 2024 semester, I will admit it became more challenging to hold students to course expectations and requirements as strictly as one would like, while recognizing how their everyday experiences were evolving, physically and emotionally, with the inception of conscription laws for the military and the limitations on their electricity supply. These barriers impacted, at times, their access to their learning, but not their enthusiasm and drive to learn. The students have revealed their resilience and their determination to learn, so that they can one day apply the skills and knowledge they gained from their studies to be future change-makers. As the semester ended, I found myself reflecting on this more recent experience and reconsidering the practices of online learning. I thought about how I continually adapted my teaching to support their learning in a changing political landscape. What follows is what I learned, which is applicable to teaching online or in person.

Background of the Conflict

Since February 2021, when power was seized from the democratically-elected government under Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar has been under a military government. Over the past three years, there has been a series of restrictions that have impacted the daily lives of the people within the country. There have been restrictions on the media—in terms of who is able to broadcast and what can be broadcast as “news,” the restrictions on and banning of certain journalists, as well as new taxation measure on internet services and even the purchase of SIM cards—all ways to control information flow and communications (Reporters Without Borders 2024). Additional restrictions in the form of electricity and power cuts have been occurring more regularly since 2019 and has increased since 2021, from disruptions due to the ongoing conflict between the military government and

opposition and other ethnic groups. Myanmar's heavy reliance on hydropower (up to around 75% of its electricity output) and the reliance on rainy periods for this, has had an impact on capacity and differentiated availability of electricity across the country. Students have also been impacted by the military government's recent public notification to enforce the 2010 *Myanmar's People Military Service Law* which mandates conscription into the military service for two-years, of all men aged 18–35, and all women aged 18-27. Public notification came out in February 2024 to take effect in April 2024 (Ratcliff and Soe 2024), causing a ripple effect with many younger Burmese citizens and their families looking for ways to assist in their exit of the country before being "called" for military service.

Some Key Lessons in Meeting Student Needs

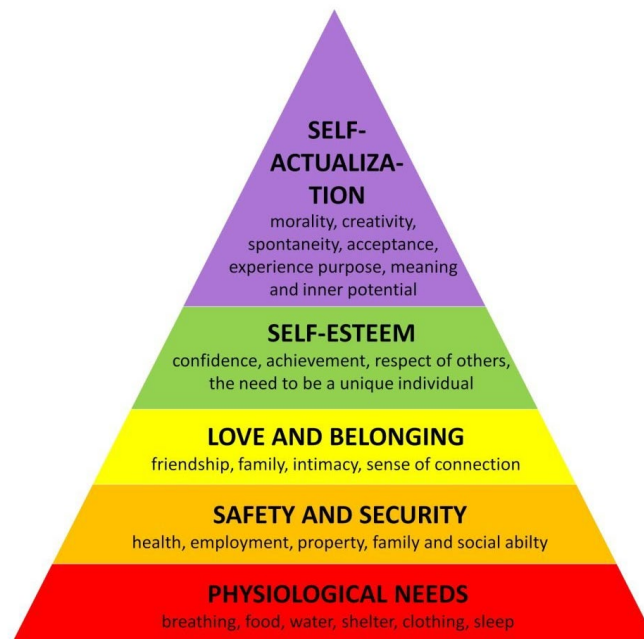
Some of my key take-aways from the past semester have been around providing a clear structure for learning that considers students' needs. Here I borrowed ideas from (Milheim 2012) and her discussion about applying Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" (1943) to the online learning environment. These include considering the different levels of needs (like physiological needs, safety and security, belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization). Below I explain how I helped meet these needs for students as lessons that can be brought into other teaching contexts.

BELONGING: Create and foster a learning community by building rapport between teachers and students, and between students (Glazier 2021) that goes beyond the topics studied and allows students to connect to each other. While we were using Zoom and Canvas learning management system (LMS) for class sessions, I started with a pre-course task that asked students to introduce themselves and what they hoped to gain from the course. This was shared with me directly in response to my own sharing about myself and why I was interested in teaching our course this semester. To develop our learning community throughout the course, we used a combination of the LMS, Zoom breakout rooms, the Workplace app, Telegram, discussion forums, and Padlet boards (started in-class and then flipped to continue work asynchronously but linked between students). Sometimes we used something as simple as a Google doc to annotate an excerpt of a reading—something that

could be started together in-class and then carried over to asynchronous work, provided valuable shared learning spaces to comment on readings, others' comments, add links to other information and resources among the group. This led to students sharing resources they came across in their independent research and reading, as well as other non-course related things like opportunities for future studying in and outside of Myanmar, and about the availability of financial support for their studies.

BELONGING: Include space to create "reflexivity" in students (Kahn et al 2017). Here, I set out in the syllabus our weekly topics and schedule, but within each class session, I created in-class individual and small group tasks (e.g., key concepts from readings, mini research tasks, and presentations) that scaffolded introduction to new concepts and skills and provided students with opportunities to use these within an active, student-centred learning environment (Mulcare and Shwedel 2017). The tasks allowed students to work within different groupings online, which in turn developed a learning community that went beyond our classroom time.

Figure 1 – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



from Mcleod (2024)

PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS, SAFETY, and SECURITY: Keep as informed as you can about the changing situation in the country. This is not something that is always easy to do. For myself, I tried to stay informed about the changes occurring within Myanmar through reports from some international news outlets like the BBC (although coverage has been limited), any recent UN agency reports, and news sites like [The Irrawaddy](https://www.irrawaddy.com)¹² (created by Myanmar journalists in exile in Thailand), [Myanmar Now](https://myanmarnow.org/en)¹³, and [Reporters Without Borders](https://rsf.org/en/country/Myanmar)¹⁴. I've searched for additional updates from websites, reports, and social media posts by NGOs and other civic organization within the region. For up-to-date news, this has come from other faculty, support staff, and students who themselves are still in Myanmar, and were willing to share some of what they are seeing, hearing about, and experiencing.

SAFETY, SECURITY, SELF ESTEEM: Understand the diversity of circumstances of students in the classroom (Cannell and Voce 2023) and remain flexible with classroom sessions. Most if not all students are willing to let you know the practicalities and what their limitations are today (e.g., weak internet connection, lack of electricity to run their laptops, using cell phone data to connect, trouble moving into breakout rooms, packing to move to another area or town, etc.). Knowing these details was helpful to understanding changing levels of engagement within my class over the semester.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION: Remain flexible towards adjusting class content and activities and have alternate plans that can be implemented as needed. For instance, I ended up adjusting our class sessions to provide additional guidance and “create” time within class sessions to scaffold some of the work to be completed for assessment policy briefs students were creating. This included ‘tasks’ that students undertook in pairs or small groups to “test” ideas, contextualizing topics to their experiences, and working through possible solutions (Man-Ho Lam 2024) by presenting these on our class Padlet board. Eventually working our way to practice

¹² <https://www.irrawaddy.com>

¹³ <https://myanmarnow.org/en>

¹⁴ <https://rsf.org/en/country/Myanmar>

runs of our final projects, and then to students presenting to the class their final project policy briefs, asking questions about their peers' work and providing constructive feedback.

While the ideas listed here are by no means new, the three inter-related things that struck me most were about fostering trust, managing the struggles that accompany conflict, and becoming aware of my own limitations as a remotely located faculty. On the question of trust, how can you foster trust among and within the class group where learning is taking place within a place where conflict is happening? To me, this meant finding a way for students to share with me what brought them to the course and finding a way to reciprocate so that the trust was not unidirectional. In terms of managing the struggles that accompany conflicts as they have real impact on learning, I found creating additional access points for students to participate and actively engage with their learning together made the course accessible no matter what the student circumstances were in terms of electricity, internet connectivity, physical space for learning, and in the event of relocation part way through the course. These different access points include simple online post-it notes, polling, dropping a short blog note, and socially annotating an excerpt from our reading together or asynchronously. Finally, in terms of my own limitations, I had to recognize that in a world where more students are struggling for their learning, looking for how I could do small things to create a learning environment that supports them as best I could within my limited resources proved worthwhile to the students I had the great fortune to work with.

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IT'S A TRAP! TEACHING BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS WITH A STAR WARS SIMULATION

By Jen Spindel (Jennifer.Spindel@unh.edu)

Announcing that you are going to spend a semester studying bureaucracy is a great way to kill the beginning-of-semester enthusiasm for a new course. Bureaucracy?! So boring! It evokes conspiracy theories about the “deep state” and causes glazed-over eyes from students who think only of red tape, government inefficiencies, and waste. In my course on national security policy, I designed an exercise to help students understand how and why bureaucracy matters using the fictional Star Wars universe.

Although some students are familiar with Star Wars, knowledge of the movies is not necessary. But taking students away from the “real world” lets them put aside their assumptions about how different organizations would or should act. I designed this exercise after the pandemic to get students out of their seats and moving around the classroom early in the semester.

The work we do prior to this activity on bureaucratic politics explains that bureaucracies want to access power and autonomy, preserve their mission, and increase their budgets (Alden and Arran 2017; Jentleson 2013). To help illustrate this, I walk students through the key US agencies involved in national security policymaking, including the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, State, and USAID. We compare their budgets, their missions, and their seats at various tables (Treasury Department, n.d.). We discuss the role of veto players (in general and in the national security context) and pay attention to the changing construction of the National Security Council over time (Bellinger 2021; Brunner 2017). I explain that bureaucratic actors need to prove their worth, defend their budgets, and protect their core missions. This theoretical and conceptual scope is a necessary foundation for the course, but students often find it dry and boring. Even after showing students the complicated and overlapping organizational charts for Homeland Security and Defense and the explosive growth in their budget outlays

(Homeland Security 2023; Department of Defense 2019), students still see bureaucracy as boring and inconsequential.

The Star Wars Bureaucracy activity that I designed puts students in the role of a department director on the Rebel Council. The prompt encourages students to think like bureaucratic actors, and I remind them of our discussion about bureaucratic behavior. They are challenged to figure out how to work together to protect Rebel interests from a possible attack, all while proving their department's worth, defending their budget, and protecting their mission from encroachment by other departments. They are told that an attack is likely to come from one of six planets: Naboo, Tatooine, Coruscant, Yavin, Hoth, or Alderaan.

I then divide students into groups of five; each group acts as its own Rebel Council. One student is the head of the Rebel Council, and the others are the director of different rebel agencies: Defense, Spy, Intelligence, and Diplomacy. Each student has a sheet of paper with bits of intelligence, their bureaucratic interests. For example, the Diplomacy director is primed to be protective of its core mission, and is instructed "that increased investment in diplomacy will pay large dividends. You're hoping to establish embassies and consulates in places that have long been forgotten. You're opposed to increased defense spending. This is a time for pens, not swords." By contrast, the Defense director is told "Your information comes from the goodwill you believe is generated by your military presence and support for friendly and allied causes. You want to prove your value to the Rebel Alliance, because with increased funding, you can upgrade your materiel and increase your number of operations. While you think diplomacy is important, you also think it needs to be backed by military might." This information primes the Rebel Defense leader to be protective of access to power. Each director is also given a nugget of intelligence that they can choose to share, or not, with the Rebel Council Leader. The Spy director knows "Unbeknownst to the others, you have spies in place on ALL of the planets, including Alderaan. You are hearing rumors that disgruntled factions on Alderaan might be channeling information to the Empire, to help them confuse your intelligence collections." They are also told, "Your sources on Coruscant and

Naboo indicate there is no threat from those places. If you had to bet, your money is on Tatooine or Yavin.” Each department has similar information and likely candidate planets, and there is not consensus about the likely origin of an attack. I deliberately constructed the exercise so that there is no “right” answer.

With only vague and partial information, each student must determine how to strategically reveal information to their Rebel Council to show that (a) their department is valuable and should get more funding, (b) that more funding would help them get better and more timely information, and (c) prevent an attack. After the Rebel Councils meet for about 20 minutes, I ask each Rebel Leader to allocate \$500 in funding and to privately tell me the planet they determined was most likely to be the origin of an attack. After each group has submitted its decision, I write the names of the chosen planets on the board.

Students are generally shocked to see that the groups came to different conclusions! Because there is no right answer, each Rebel Council focuses on different information based on the types of arguments and the information each director chooses to reveal. Students’ bureaucratic negotiations about priorities, information, and desire to prove their worth means each Rebel Council comes to a different conclusion. Most recently, the five groups in this exercise chose Hoth, Yavin, Alderaan, and two groups chose Tatooine.

After getting over their initial shock at the different conclusions, we discuss why each Rebel Council came to a different conclusion. While the planets chosen vary year to year, the explanations are consistent. Students will explain that they withheld some information because they didn’t want a different Department to undermine their own authority or access to power. Other students share that they were skeptical of the information provided by Defense, because the Defense representative was so adamant about getting more money. Usually, the Diplomatic representative makes an alliance with Defense or Intelligence to try to piggyback off what they assume will be a larger share of the budget. The debrief discussion allows me to return to discussing the theory of logic and bureaucracy, and use their

specific experiences in the activity to talk through examples of bureaucracy at work. The students' initial frustration at the lack of a clear right answer quickly yields to a deeper appreciation of bureaucracy. It is a particularly helpful example of how bureaucracies generate their own bureaucratic interests.

Beyond illustrating the ways that bureaucracies work, the timing of the activity just three weeks into the semester helps students come together and learn each other's names. By this point, add/drop is settled, and students have established their location in the classroom. But in the post-COVID era, students need an extra push to directly engage with one another. Following this exercise, I have consistently observed students using each other's names, working more easily with their peers in future small group activities, and seeming more comfortable speaking in class (Asal and Blake 2007; Clark and Scherpereel 2024). This exercise is particularly helpful post-pandemic, because students learn the names of at least five other classmates in a low-stakes small-group setting, which helps students who are reluctant to talk to one another slowly break down those hesitations. I also find that revealing my excitement about science fiction and fantasy (we do an exercise using Star Trek in the middle of the semester) helps the students see me as more than the person lecturing to them; following the exercise, students have shared their own interest in TV or movies that they think I might also like. Overall, the exercise creates a welcoming—if nerdy—environment that shows students often there are no right answers, and that the strength of one's argument and logic is a crucial skill to develop during the class.

Fellow faculty interested in adopting the Star Wars Bureaucracy game for their own class are welcome to email me for a copy of the activity. I have avoided publicly posting it on my website so that future students cannot get a head start on the activity!

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USING NON-CONTENT-RELATED QUIZ QUESTIONS TO BUILD RAPPORT

By Rebecca A. Glazier (raglazier@ualr.edu)

Preparing a new class can be a great way to think about pedagogy with a clean slate. But it can also be a lot of work. I recently taught American National Government for the first time and it presented me with just this conundrum: introductory level, online, and totally asynchronous. With a lot of my students being in their first year of college and enrolled in an asynchronous online class, I knew that I was going to have to work hard to keep them engaged.

The pedagogical solution I settled on was weekly quizzes. They served as a kind of attendance policy. Just as taking roll in introductory in-person classes can be a way of keeping new students accountable (Moore 2003; Rendleman 2017), these quizzes helped them stay engaged with course material each week.

But I also wanted to build rapport with my students by helping them to feel like I care about their success and to make real human connections with them (Glazier 2016, 2021). So, I snuck at least one “rapport-building” question into every weekly quiz. I asked the students everything from: “What’s going on? A new semester is starting! How are you doing? How can I help?” to “If you could only eat one dessert for the rest of your life, what would it be?”

These questions gave the students a chance to connect with me about something silly or something serious. Sometimes they told me that they were not doing okay. Students typed all kinds of things into the digital void and hoped for connection: funny stories about pets, concerns about sick family members, feelings of being overwhelmed. Even though I am in the Bible Belt in Little Rock, Arkansas, I was honestly surprised by the number of students who asked me to pray for them. On the last quiz of the semester (right before Thanksgiving break) the check in question was: “This is your last quiz! That means it’s your last chance to check in with me one-on-one in these freebie questions. Tell me the truth, do you ever read the personal responses I write to your answers?” I was moderately surprised to

learn that 2/3 of the students who completed the quiz that week responded that they read my responses every week (I may have wondered if I was sending my responses into the digital void). I got responses like:

- “YES! I always check for a response. 😊 I think its so awesome that you continuously check in on your students throughout the semester.”
- “Yes I do! They’re a fun way to check in and your answers tickled me at times.”
- “Yay! What an awesome semester! I have learned and gained so much from fellow classmates and you as my professor as well. Of course I read your feedback, enjoy your Thanksgiving break we are headed [specific details of Thanksgiving plans].”

The students loved the rapport in this class and I felt really connected to them, as well. But this was a fully asynchronous, introductory level, required course. We may have been building rapport, but what did the retention numbers look like? Well, we know from years of research that retention in online classes is consistently lower than in face-to-face classes (Glazier 2021; Jaggars 2013).

I looked at the percentage of students earning D’s, F’s, or withdrawing completely (DFW rate) for American National Government at my university from 2017 to 2023. It averaged 28.1% or more than 1 in 4 students not successfully passing this foundational course. The semester with the best DFW rate was Summer 2021 with only 2% and the semester with the worst DFW rate was fall 2019 with 55%. Ouch. My DFW rate for Spring 2023 was 15.6%. Honestly, I wish it was better. I lost 5 of the 32 students in my class (4 of whom just stopped showing up or responding to emails), but I think this was the best I could do, given the student population I teach, many of whom have significant family responsibilities, are first generation college students, and/or work multiple jobs.

What I learned from this experience was that keeping in regular contact with students through weekly quizzes helped to keep them engaged. And using non-content-related questions on those quizzes helped me to check in on them, offer

help when they needed it, and build the kind of rapport that led to a significantly lower DFW rate than was usually seen for this introductory course.

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¹⁵ https://www.amazon.com/dp/1421442655/ref=as_sl_pc_tf_til?tag=rebeccaglazier-20&linkCode=w00&linkId=55ff37666d288f2d0a56290529166005&creativeASIN=1421442655

USING READING GROUPS TO ENCOURAGE DEEPER AND BROADER READING

By Colin M. Brown (colin.brown@northeastern.edu)

I came out of an undergraduate and graduate tradition of assigning massive reading lists on each course syllabus. While I often did not read everything assigned (sorry!), I remember spending a considerable amount of time reading outside of class. It took a long time for me to fully grasp how political science readings worked, and I spent a lot of time unlearning how to read—which I had always done by starting at the first word and consecutively reading every other word, slowly, and in order.

When it came time for me to start assigning readings, I found that students were also daunted by the long reading lists and not engaging with the works I had so carefully chosen. To encourage greater reading and to help my students learn more quickly how academic reading works, I started developing “reading groups” where students in my introductory courses would be assigned a list of readings that they had to learn collectively and teach each other, but not attempt to read everything themselves. I hoped that this would be a signal to my students, largely first-year majors or upper-level students taking an elective, that there were different and potentially better ways of reading. After several years, I have found that students really appear to value the chance to read a few things more thoroughly and take ownership on teaching some of the material to each other.

Background

There has been significant and growing concern about our students’ ability to read in the college classroom. This has been blamed on changes to K-12 reading instruction (Kotsko 2024; McMurtrie 2024), students being more and more pragmatic about their time in face of increasing demands (MacPhail 2019), or a lack of understanding about how academic texts actually work (Jamieson 2013). It may also come from a perceived mismatch in how much reading is emphasized by faculty against how much they believe it benefits their grades (Gorzycki et al 2020), or an expectation that faculty should have the teaching and/or lecture skills to

convey all the information in class (Gorzycki et al 2020). The role of COVID-era adaptations and the increasing role of smartphones in reading and communication have also been blamed (McMurtrie 2024). While it is quite likely that we overestimate how much of the reading students in the past completed—and certainly not enough thought was given to the way that disability or neurodivergence may have affected student approaches to “doing the reading”—there appears to be a clear feeling among instructors that students are doing less of the reading since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, even as they may be complaining more about how much reading is being assigned.

Faculty may also be unwilling to teach reading strategies, as “learning how to read” feels like it should be something that students would have already learned before coming to college—and students are likely to have internalized this idea that they should already know how to read, making it more difficult for them to seek help (Smale 2020). Even if faculty value reading as a strategy, faculty are often unlikely to incorporate it explicitly into curricula in favor of course content (Desa et al 2020). And there are usually few resources devoted to teaching disciplinary faculty how to teach reading literacy.

It is unlikely that any one of us can reverse these trends in our own classroom, all by ourselves. Any attempt to use college classroom strategies to fix this will quickly run up against structural limits, particularly if there are broader changes in primary education or our broader reading culture. Nonetheless, instructors have an obligation to try solutions, and if students are reading less—and less able to read—we have to come up with ways to try and increase the amount of reading that students are exposed to, and to increase their confidence with the kinds of academic texts that our discipline produces and which they’ll want to be able to access in policy, research, or journalistic careers.

A method that I have been using in my own classes is to create “reading groups.” Sets of readings are assigned to the group rather than expected of every individual in class, and the group is accountable for collectively having done the reading and

taught the main points to one another. After a few years—and keeping this going through the disruptions of COVID-19—I have found this to be at least moderately effective at providing some additional support to develop reading strategies and allowing my introductory courses (primarily comparative politics in my case) to cover more of the broad range of questions that political science deals with.

Setting up Reading Groups

As with groups in almost all my classes, I ask students to fill out a one-question survey asking if they prefer to work on projects collaboratively or to “divide and conquer,” grouping preferred working styles together but otherwise assigning them randomly. (This is a tactic for reducing intragroup conflict recommended to me by our university’s center for teaching and learning and has anecdotally worked quite well for me.) The syllabus and reading list on our class LMS clearly indicate which readings are assigned to the groups to be read in this way, and which much smaller subset of readings are expected to be read in their entirety by each student. This ends up being the majority of the assigned reading in the middle part of the class; I usually start the groups about 3 weeks into the semester and wrap them up for the last 2-3 weeks of our 14-week semesters.

I allow students to distribute the workload in the group according to preference, background knowledge, time, and working strategies, usually with each student taking about one reading per week. To build in a little bit of slack, I usually assign one fewer reading per week than the groups’ size, so that if my groups are primarily made up of five students there are about four readings per week.

This kind of assignment is particularly well-suited for empirical, qualitative and/or quantitative academic research journal articles. These already make up a large part of many syllabi especially for upper-level courses, and we seem to largely assume that over the course of an undergraduate career students will eventually figure out how to read these. But the specific kind of writing that appears in peer-reviewed outlets has particular aspects that make it: a) unintuitive for beginners, but b) amenable to explicitly teaching and demystifying. By assigning these to the groups

and requiring them to teach each other, students appear to much more quickly understand that there are central arguments in these papers, and that they as non-researchers do not actually need to read, comprehend and analyze every word.

While the main point of assigning research articles in this way is to help them learn how to engage with the format, it also allows the group to more fully survey the kinds of work published in political science journals. Each student may only read a few papers in depth, but as a group they begin to get a sense of what political scientists actually *do* in the important and perhaps most visible part of our work that is knowledge production (that creates a body of knowledge and set of practices of systemically discovering politics).

In addition to holding students accountable for the main arguments of the assigned group readings on quizzes and the final exam, I give groups a template for a study guide that they can fill in and use to share their notes within the group. On the final exam, they are allowed to use the study guide to help them more quickly find the right texts to cite and draw on for short essays. The study guide earns them points but is not letter-graded, simply encouraging them to make sure they cover all of the readings by the time the term is over. It also scaffolds the learning by requiring pre-processing of some material before the recall required on the quizzes and final exam. As with all group projects, occasional check-ins may be needed and groups may find that some members do not fully pull their weight. Because the final assignment is letter-graded this is usually resolved within the groups—with some students occasionally free-riding—but the long-term nature of the group over the course of the semester has usually allowed enough time for the groups to resolve conflicts on their own or seek my assistance.

One disadvantage is that I am unable to assume that any particular student has done any particular reading, even though they should be (and usually are) pretty familiar with the main points. If there are readings that I want students to grapple with—that don't have a set of straightforward points—I need to assign those separately and make it clear that they are required to read it directly. Making sure

there is time in class designed to discuss these also signals the importance of each student reading them. But given the amount of group readings assigned, and the nature of an introductory course, I am much stingier with this kind of deeper text and only assign a small number of them. However, this also tends to signal the importance of this kind of reading and contrast the different reading strategies that different kinds of writing might require.

Conclusions

As mentioned above, there is only so far that our strategies can help students with reading skills, especially as few of us in political science are specifically trained in teaching literacy. Because of this, simply giving students the time and space to practice, having them help each other, and clearly signaling the importance of reading by giving it class time—and communicating that it’s a skill to develop, not a talent or something they “missed”—has allowed me to continue assigning a considerable amount of reading in introductory courses with buy-in from most of the students.

Appendix – Study Guide Template

Here is one suggestion of how to organize your study guides so that you're focused on the things you need to know, for the quizzes/exams and as a general student of political science, without spending too long on anyone reading:

1. Article Title:
2. Author & Year:
3. Main Point:
4. Puzzle/Problem/Debate:
5. Type of Data:
6. Hypotheses:
7. Criticisms:
8. Interesting Notes:

Remember to write these in a way that your classmates can understand even if they haven't read them. But remember also this isn't letter graded---don't spend too much time polishing this or making it "perfect" for the instructor to

read! Feel free to change or add or subtract a category *based on what works for you and your group*.

Some ways to think about the above categories:

- Main Point: In 2-3 sentences, what is their main point? If we only learn/remember one thing, what should it be?
- Puzzle/Problem/Debate: In a sentence or two, What is the "puzzle" or problem they're trying to solve, or what is the debate they are taking part in?
- Hypotheses: What were their hypotheses? Which ones held up?
- Criticisms: Critique the article. What are one or two flaws or limits to the article? Are they serious flaws, or just things that could be improved in another study? You won't always have this, but you should try to develop the habit of it!
- Interesting Notes: A couple of interesting facts or details that helped you understand the piece or you think might be useful to know for other readings or just in general. Keep this pretty short, but use this as a hook for future learning or to remind yourself of interesting things that were useful but not the main point.

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CAN CHATGPT AND CROWDSOURCED FORECASTING HELP STUDENTS THINK ABOUT INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS? A NEW CLASS ASSIGNMENT

By Justin Robertson (justin.robertson@cityu.edu.hk)

The arrival of ChatGPT has sparked existential questions about the future of the humanities and social sciences and has been accompanied in its wake by a hardline response: some instructors treat any use of ChatGPT as a punishable form of plagiarism. The following analysis is an attempt to determine if one can engage constructively with ChatGPT in a student assignment. It does so in the form of a new exercise where students are asked to interact with two significant developments in the field of information analysis simultaneously: ChatGPT, as an example of artificial intelligence, and collective intelligence, in the form of crowdsourced forecasting. Crowdsourced forecasting is founded on the belief that aggregating a large number of insights will yield predictions that are equally or more accurate than expert opinion. Major news outlets have run high-profile stories on crowdsourced forecasting in recent years (New York Times 2023; The Guardian 2022). When asked to assess their experience integrating information from these two sources, the students reported only lukewarm satisfaction with the performance of ChatGPT, while offering somewhat higher reviews for the role of crowdsourced forecasting. Among the most significant outcomes, the students thought more deeply about bias found in new information processes such as ChatGPT and crowdsourced forecasting and learned how to formulate better prompts.

As instructors, we typically design assignments that confront historical and emerging patterns. However, there is scope for a limited use of future-oriented thinking in which students closely analyze recent trends and lay out future scenarios. It forces students to think through their key theoretical assumptions of structures, processes, and actors, and above all the potential for social change. Lastly, making predictions is increasingly seen to stimulate learning. As Lang (2016: 61) writes, "Predictions make us curious—I wonder whether I will be right?—and curiosity is an emotion that has been recently demonstrated to boost

memory when it is heightened prior to exposure to new material.” I am not the first to design an assignment around forecasting, but these relatively small number of articles have nearly all been concentrated on forecasting elections (Berg and Chambers 2019; Leiter 2023). International relations presents a broader and livelier canvas on which to forecast; for example, during the assignment period, students were confronted with crises in Gaza and the Ukraine.

A long-running major experiment recently found that social science experts performed no better than members of the general public at forecasting social phenomena (The Forecasting Collaborative 2023). The research team concluded with a silver lining, “The good news is that forecasting skills can be improved.” (The Forecasting Collaborative 2023: 493) One of the key mechanisms singled out is that forecasters who paid particularly close attention to prior data are more likely to be accurate (The Forecasting Collaborative 2023: 484). This finding raises an important pedagogical question that is particularly relevant today: can ChatGPT play a supportive role in the learning process, in this case by more easily and effectively compiling prior data for students who are preparing forecasts? Students were not asked to directly test ChatGPT’s ability to forecast. One recent study found ChatGPT fared significantly worse than human participants at forecasting (Schoenegger and Park 2023). Instead, the goal is to bring ChatGPT alongside the student as a research assistant, finetuning the ability to harness information and determine whether such information can help form a position on a forecast.

There are now many examples of how university instructors are designing creative assignments that feature an AI component (Chronicle of Higher Education 2024). Ethan Mollick of the University of Pennsylvania is a leader here, with his *One Useful Thing* newsletter on Substack and his pedagogy effectively summarized in a recent interview (The Ezra Klein Show 2024). Few of these first-generation experiments in teaching with AI turn the attention back on AI itself and ask students, first and foremost, to write critically and reflectively about the learning experience. Most assignments are output-oriented with the assistance of AI. The contribution of my course exercise is to ensure that students are reflecting on how AI is impacting

knowledge processes at this early stage in the development of AI. Students were told that this assignment was not a conventional research assignment in which they would formulate a research question, collect evidence, and develop an argument. They would be taking part in a new experience of forecasting assisted by AI research and they would provide analysis, observations and reflection based on this experience.

The Mechanics of the Exercise

Students in a second-year international relations theory course at a university in Hong Kong critically compared and contrasted the information they collected on issues in world politics using both technologies. I partnered with Good Judgement Open (GJO), one of the three leading crowdsourced forecasting platforms, which enabled my students to be active members of their forecasting community. This entailed answering a large number of forecasts as well as putting forward their own forecasting questions. GJO is a credible organization with a rising user base and its forecasts are featured regularly in *The Economist*. Most recently, its forecasts were profiled as a key barometer of the world in 2024 (The Economist 2023).

The GJO partnership was powerful because the platform presents comparative data to allow students to set their own views in context to others. When a student is forecasting on a given question, they are unaware of the consensus forecast. In real time, students are able to see how their forecasts compare to their peer group (the classmates in the course), to the full GJO sample, and for a limited number of questions, to expert forecasters. Students can also adjust their forecast over time and observe how the consensus forecast moves up and down over a longer period.

Students researched and highlighted factors drawn from ChatGPT searches that bear on the forecast. I explained to students that there would be substantial data generated as a result of the interaction between generative AI and crowdsourced forecasting, data that they would analyze and report on in written assignments.

Students presented their findings in two written pieces. The first assignment involved answering two questions in up to 900 words:

- What observations can you offer concerning the types of forecasting questions posed, the forecasts you made, and how your forecasts were similar or different to the crowd?
- Did the forecasting experience shift some of your views on international issues, generally and/or on any specific issues? Why or why not?

The second and longer assignment of up to 2,000 words required students to answer four questions:

- Show how you used ChatGPT to prepare for your forecasts. What steps did you take with ChatGPT? Critically evaluate the quality of information that ChatGPT generated. Note any potential limitations or biases in the information provided by ChatGPT.
- Talk about one forecast, including how you reached your forecast position, how credible you think the crowd forecast was, and what this forecast tells us about international relations. Attach a relevant example of text that ChatGPT generated for you with this forecast and tell me why it was helpful or unhelpful (the ChatGPT text should be excluded from your word count).
- Do ChatGPT and forecasting complement each other, or not, in trying to think about international issues?
- Based on this experience, do you believe that forecasting should be a tool more widely used in society? Why or why not?

The two assignments challenged students to engage with different types of analysis. The first assignment is centered on larger data assessment and

determining patterns among the forecasting data generated during this period. Some students skillfully produced tables comparing the forecasts made by the crowd, their peers and themselves. The data analysis is combined with personal reflection in the form of reporting any shifts in perspectives on international relations. The case study method sits at the center of the second assignment and the objectives are a) to draw out ChatGPT's relative merits and weaknesses and b) to answer whether ChatGPT and forecasting work well together and whether forecasting as a methodology should be elevated in society.

Outcomes and Findings

The exercise empowered student voices with the prospect that their forecasting questions might reach a wide audience. Naturally, many students were initially unable to form sufficiently strong questions to be posted by GJO, but, at a minimum, the brainstorming process brought them closer to the ideals of forecasting. Students reported that proposing questions about the future was both challenging and rewarding in identifying key debates about trends in international relations and critical case studies. Importantly, some students furnished informative questions that were published by GJO and forecast upon by the general public, including for example:

- Will COP28 result in an agreement that includes explicit language committing to phase out all fossil fuels for energy production by a specific date?
- Will the "natural growth rate" of the population of China in 2023 be negative?

Some of the most important identifiable trends among student papers can be discussed. About half of the students articulated significant disappointment with ChatGPT and the other half found value in its research support. Students adopted a more positive tone towards crowdsourced forecasting than ChatGPT with only one-third of the class presenting a critical interpretation of forecasting.

The most common ChatGPT strengths cited by students included: its capabilities to support background research, especially providing historical context; its power to generate ideas and hypotheses; and, its ability to summarize arguments for and against a given position. On the other hand, students complained that ChatGPT is prone to generic responses that are often too brief and are particularly mediocre in terms of current affairs. One student spoke of the limited role in which ChatGPT can be deployed: "ChatGPT helps to provide skeleton outlines but separate detailed research is always needed to actually write papers."

The most pronounced criticism of crowdsourced forecasting is that it is unrepresentative of global issues. Students noted that forecasts are unduly geared to a Western, and particularly American, perspective. One student wrote: "This bias reflects the dominance of the US and other Western powers in shaping international affairs with a tendency to prioritize Western political discourse and issues. This leads to a relative lack of emphasis on Asian-focused questions." Two examples illustrate how students drew on empirical research to make this claim. First, a student reported that on one sample day during the exercise 16 out of the 20 questions listed under the category "In the News 2024" related to political and economic developments in the US and Europe. Second, another student asked ChatGPT to suggest ten forecasting questions and demonstrated that ChatGPT's roster of forecasting questions was more globally representative than the US-based crowdsourced platforms. There is space, students felt, for a more global outlook in crowdsourced forecasting and one student recommended that a more global audience could be attracted should prediction platforms "strive to incorporate multiple languages and employ automatic translation for each entry."

Forecasting further introduced them to the study of bias, with several students noticing that ChatGPT was more reticent to address divisive topics in Western countries in detail than similar questions elsewhere in the world. The exercise shifted few student views but it forced them to research unfamiliar topics—quite a few mentioned the global price of oil—and in the process exposed them to new

information and new research tools. The exercise taught students how to frame better prompts with generative AI, and this represents a useful problem-solving skill. As one student wrote, "If the question is not specific, the AI tends to provide a broad response, whereas a well-structured question yields crucial information relevant to the forecasting task."

Possible Modifications for Future Exercises

The three major crowdsourced forecasting platforms, GJO, INFER Public, and Metaculus, were all willing to support my assignment. If you are interested in incorporating a crowdsourced forecasting experiment into one of your courses, you are likely to find willing organizational partner.

There is significant room to craft your own forecasting exercise and the model in this article serves as one illustrative example, with a focus on reflection. Students could also integrate crowdsourced forecasting and generative AI into a paper by tackling one issue/theme in a research-based analysis. Such a paper would involve the following steps:

1. Choose a major issue in international relations
2. Conduct ChatGPT research
3. Search for predictions, data points, and discussions related to the issue on forecasting platforms
4. Compare and contrast information from these two tools
5. Incorporate material from both ChatGPT and crowdsourced forecasting—and document the process—in the formation and defence of your argument

A number of smaller modifications deserve consideration. First, and building on the finding that forecasting improves when forecasters collaborate in teams (Friedman et al. 2018), you could ask your class to negotiate as a whole and carry out a select number of forecasts with one class position. It would be exciting to discuss an issue, take a vote, and then for the students to follow the progression of the class forecast.

Second, there would be value in asking students to consult more than one forecasting platform. This would increase the comparative data from which they could draw in developing arguments. Some platforms like GJO restrict forecasts to issues that must have a known outcome within one year, which is understandable but the advantage of sites like Metaculus is that they allow forecasting on longer-term trends. When proposing questions, my students framed a number of interesting questions for which the resolution would only be clear over a longer time span. For example, only Metaculus would have published these questions submitted by students:

- Will Africa have a company in the Fortune 500 by 2028?
- Will peak oil demand be reached in 2028 and subsequently fall in every year after?
- If Trump wins the US Presidency, will the US leave NATO?

Finally, instructors could stipulate that students must revisit concluded forecasts during the course and evaluate the factors that explain why their forecast and the crowdsourced forecast were either accurate or inaccurate.

Conclusion

ChatGPT, as a new technology, is ripe for close analysis and reflection by students just as much as by instructors. This article has set out one example of how ChatGPT can be integrated into a course assignment. Students weighed the value of AI research, identified patterns in crowdsourced forecasting outcomes, and reflected on the significance of these results after experiencing both processes first-hand. Students found crowdsourced forecasting to be a stronger learning tool than ChatGPT. The exercise impacted students by challenging them to research less-known topics with a new research tool and a future-oriented perspective. Crowdsourced platforms, while small, are growing, well-organized and able to generate substantial comparative data for students to evaluate. Are they able to foster insights on the direction of international relations? There is significant

potential for political science instructors to pair ChatGPT and their own crowdsourced forecasting assignments to further shed light on this fundamental question.

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CONSIDERING EDTECH IN POLITICAL SCIENCE TEACHING: DATA LITERACY, PRIVACY RIGHTS, AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN REGULATION

By Janet L. Donovan (janet.donovan@colorado.edu)

As a political scientist who regularly teaches Introduction to American Politics and Media and Politics, helping students develop information literacy is a key learning goal in my teaching. An important topic in these courses is learning how data is utilized to tailor content and advertising, as well as in behavioral modeling. The importance of understanding how and why our data is being used has led me to reconsider some of the educational technology, or “edtech,” that I regularly use in teaching. As many of us understand how behavioral modeling works and how regulatory systems do or can work, we as political scientists have a role in helping students and others consider how to weigh the benefits of edtech versus the potential problems with these technologies.

I tend to put edtech into three categories: useful for my students and myself; interesting but not useful for my students and myself; or not a good technology. Until recently, I have had a positive take on integrating technology into instruction. I have served as a Faculty Fellow with the Arts & Sciences Support of Education through Technology (ASSETT) for two separate two-year periods, and I didn’t have much trouble pivoting online during COVID-19 because I already knew the technologies. However, I have had some troubling encounters with these technologies, either in my own courses or as the Director of Undergraduate Studies in our department. Ed tech products are in some cases violating student privacy, using student and faculty data to create and improve products (including training AI) without compensation, using our data to develop behavioral models and predictive analytics without compensation, and retaining data on us indefinitely. Helping students understand how their data is being used, allowing them consent, and giving them the tools to decide whether regulation is necessary or desirable is part of understanding the role of government and the nature of data and data analysis.

Like me, the literature on the use of edtech in higher education has mostly been positive. Among other findings, technology helps students visualize content, promotes interactions with instructor and other students, supports meaningful student reflection, provides opportunities for authentic learning, and improves the quality and quantity of student practice (West and Graham 2005). Learning management systems (LMSs) increase engagement and participation in simulation activities (Mathews and Latronica Herb 2013), clickers increase student engagement among students who otherwise might not participate (Holland, Schwartz-Shea, and Yim 2013; Ulberg 2013; Ulbeg and Notman 2012) and technologies like online video production and social media increase students' skills (Florez-Morris and Tafur 2010; Le and Pol 2022). Although the literature is largely positive, other scholars have been more mixed or negative on the findings of effectiveness, with Michels (2023) warning about the promise and potential peril of artificial intelligence (AI) and Mancillas and Brusoe (2015) finding no significant learning outcome differences in students taught with varying levels of edtech.

Beyond effectiveness, it is important to grapple with the ethics of new technologies, and especially the privacy and intellectual property implications for our students, as well as the potential that data being created by our use of various technologies is being monetized in ways that exploit our students and ourselves. Edtech products collect learning analytics (LA) data which can be used by institutions or individual faculty to address learner needs but can also be used by the companies behind the products for their own purposes (Daniel 2017). Anti-plagiarism software collects student work as its database and trains both AI and AI-detection products using that content (Brown, et al 2007; Morris and Stommel 2017). Various applications track students' personal information and location in ways that threaten individual privacy and treat students and their data as products (Apps, Beckman and Howard (2022). These concerns apply to one of the most popular edtech tools. I have avoided naming the specific products, as the issues identified are similar with most products in each category.

Plagiarism and AI Detectors

I confess to adopting plagiarism detection without much thought. Our LMS has an integrated plagiarism detector and I “checked the box” for plagiarism detection for years. My thought would help students to see their “plagiarism score” in advance of submitting the paper and make adjustments. I design assignments using best practices to make them difficult to plagiarize (WPA 2017) and I have only identified a few cases of plagiarism in my classes using this software across thousands of students. In most cases, these were cases of sloppy attribution, or an overly aggressive algorithm citing common phrases as plagiarism. The main value is to encourage students to catch plagiarism before submitting work. This year, an instructor reached out for advice after being contacted by the plagiarism detection software provider asking for a student assignment to be sent to an instructor at another institution for review. Because the student saved the assignment with their name as the file name (which students are often instructed to do, for example 101_Donavan_Midterm1), the student’s name had been retained in the plagiarism system and revealed to this other instructor. I became aware of how student papers as well as instructor feedback are being saved in these systems and fed through plagiarism algorithms in ways that are sloppy at best at providing student privacy, with student or faculty names being shared by the system when they are in the file name. The significant work of both the student and the professor are being used as data, without compensation. This led me to stop “checking the box.” If I read a paper and suspect plagiarism, I will track it down myself in the future.

In another case, an instructor reached out for advice after suspecting AI use on how to proceed. Through communicating with our office of information technology and running the assignment through multiple AI detectors, we learned that there is no clear evidence of the accuracy of AI detectors. With both plagiarism detectors and AI detectors, student writing is used to program and train software that we are being charged to use or will likely be charged for in the future, and for which we are not receiving compensation. The use of either plagiarism or AI detecting software is one where good instructors may differ, but I encourage considering the implications. I have decided to use other means for evaluating papers that may

have used AI; tactics include checking citations to make sure they are real, reading the paper for inaccurate ideas or attributions, and advising students to be more concise and specific in their writings. I allow students to use AI, but warn that they are responsible for the content and required to specify that they used AI and why.

Learning Management Systems

I first used an LMS in 2007 to teach distance learning courses. Prior to that, I had taught distance learning courses with both mailed assignments and emailed assignments; teaching through an LMS for distance learning was certainly an improvement. However, I have always tried to ensure that for courses with an in-person modality, students could choose to use the LMS as a tool or not. During COVID-19, this became more difficult; since COVID-19, inclusive access policies at my institution have encouraged using textbooks that are integrated into the LMS. It is difficult to ask or require students to turn in hard copies, as there are few printing facilities on campus. The expectation has become that everything is done through the LMS.

These developments have increased data being collected, as each individual is recorded clicking on material, spending time on activities, and completing assessments. It has also increased the amount of data being collected on how we teach, how much time we spend grading, and more. In fact, LMS software is constantly collecting data on students and faculty, and companies use this data to develop products and research how different people teach and learn (Jones 2019). This data is used for predictive analytics in predicting who will be successful in which courses with which pedagogical approaches (Daniels 2017). This holds hope for inclusive student success, but it also creates the possibility of selecting students for admission based on expected performance. Either way, we are being used in studies without our consent. I am still using the LMS, but exploring ways to mitigate privacy concerns, such as reducing integrations (such as lecture capture, textbooks, plagiarism detectors) and having work submitted and graded outside the LMS. I believe a broader discussion is necessary, including institutional negotiation with edtech companies and the consideration of privacy legislation.

Conclusions

Developing our own course policies on edtech and explaining our decisions for students can be a launching point for discussing issues of governmental regulation of technology, the right to privacy, data collection and analysis, behavioral modeling and the political implications of AI. I recommend addressing these issues as part of a “tech check” when setting up a class for the semester. Important questions to ask about the tech tools we are using include asking whether the current tool is the best tool for the job, whether there are ways to minimize the exposure of both student and instructor data and behavior, whether and how to make the use of data more transparent, and whether and how the ed tech policies can be teachable political science issues. Then, we can discuss and share our policies with our students and colleagues across the academy. Information and technological literacy are some of the biggest challenges of our times, and opportunities to examine these issues are embedded in all of our courses that use edtech tools.

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POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMS IN THE AGE OF AI

By Erik Ringmar (erik@ringmar.net)

When ChatGPT-3.5 was released on the world in the fall of 2022, there was a collective sense of amazement. This was not a ghost in a machine, but instead something suspiciously close to a human being. The chatbot engaged in conversations on any topic, wrote iambic verse in the voice of a pirate, and even declared its love for its users. It also did really well on exams. ChatGPT-4, released in March 2023, scored 90% on the bar exam (OpenAI et al. 2024). When I asked it to take the political science exams I gave to my undergraduate students, it provided answers in the B+ to A- range. It was obvious that teaching, or at least examining students, would never be the same again.

The first, and very understandable, reaction from some teachers was to ban the damn thing. Relying on AI to write a take-home exam is obviously very similar to asking someone else to write it for you. And that is cheating! The question was only what to do about it. Although the regular AI voice is quite distinct in some ways, it is at the same time easy to disguise. You can even ask AI to disguise itself, making it virtually undetectable. As a consequence, many teachers concluded, we have to go back to the next-to-abandoned format of hand-written, in-class, exams—and leave all electronic devices at the door as you enter the classroom!

The alternative is to find a way to cohabitate with the beast. Or better yet: let's think positive! AI is obviously a fantastic resource that has the potential to improve every aspect of university education. However, for this to happen, we must be prepared to think creatively and experiment a bit. There are a number of promising suggestions. AI can offer personalized support based on the students' engagement and performance, identify failing students, and serve as a virtual TA by helping answer routine queries. If we "flip the classroom," AI can provide interactive assignments for students to complete at home, while they can do their homework in class. In this way, it is easier for teachers to make sure that students are not simply copying and pasting.

During the past three semesters, I have experimented with a new form of exams. I ask the students to write “stories” about what I call “items.” An item can be anything – a text we read in class, a YouTube clip, a picture, a poem—and the story is what connects the items to each other. The task, in other words, is to identify and describe the respective items, but above all, to join them together by means of an overarching plot. The items are sort of speaking to each other, and the job of the students is to tell me what they are saying. I have a certain plot in mind, but there is no right answer as such. Students can connect the items in ways I hadn’t expected, and those answers can be equally good. When I grade, they are then rewarded on their knowledge of the material we have covered in class and on their creativity.

So how does AI do on these exams? Not very well. ChatGPT-4 is perfectly capable of identifying the individual items, and it can describe them in great detail. The connections it draws between them, though, are always superficial and often nonsensical. And this is not surprising. The connections are generally topics we discussed in class, and AI wasn’t there to listen and take notes. It could also be that this exercise is beyond what AI is capable of (for now). You have to see the connection—it is a sort of aha! moment—and AI doesn’t seem to be having those. As a result, ChatGPT and its colleagues are not a threat to this exam format. Indeed, I can safely allow students to use AI, even encourage them to use it!

Let me give you an example. This is an exam question from my Introduction to International Relations course. The three items are 1) an excerpt from Chapter XIII of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*; 2) an idyllic, AI-generated picture of life in a stateless society; and 3) a link to a newspaper article in which Donald Tusk, the Prime Minister of Poland, warns about the possibility of a coming European war. By means of artificial intelligence, it is easy to identify these items. But what is the connection between them? The idyllic depiction of life in a stateless society is clearly a riposte to Hobbes. But where does that then leave the Polish Prime Minister? A student who has taken my course, and paid proper attention, will

remember that Hobbes' thirteenth chapter has been used by IR theorists to describe the concept of "anarchy," and that concept clearly speaks to Tusk's concerns. But that story cannot easily include the picture of the stateless society. A better student will remember that Hedley Bull (on the reading list) compared the international system to a stateless society, and the very best student will connect that description first with Hobbes and then with the prospect of another war in Europe. In this way, this becomes a story about the nature of the international system, the role of social norms in regulating human conduct, and so on. Or this, at least, was my idea.

Another example comes from my course on diplomatic history. Here item 1) is an AI-generated picture of a Hindu avatar; item 2) an extract from Samuel Pepys' diary of September 30, 1661, which describes a violent clash at the Tower of London between the diplomatic delegations of France and Spain; item 3) is a chapter from John Bassett Moore's *The Principles of American Diplomacy*, 1918. The connection I had in mind here concerns the way ambassadors in early modern Europe were treated as avatars of the states they represented, and how this constantly led to diplomatic "incidents" and quarrels about protocol. Moore's chapter explains how post-independence Americans refused to interact on these terms and favored a more democratic and businesslike form of diplomacy. Here, for my students, the avatar was clearly the biggest stumbling block. Many didn't remember that we had discussed the role of early modern ambassadors in these terms, and many didn't realize that "avatar" is a Hindu concept. The best students understood this connection and went on to discuss how European diplomacy has its origin in an aristocratic court culture and how 19th century Americans sought to replace this culture with a "republican" form of diplomacy.

In this way, students come to place themselves quite neatly along an A to F spectrum. The best students do well on these exams, and the not-so-good do not-so-well. The worst answers are those that never go beyond the information that AI can provide. The best answers are those that find the connections, and go on exploring, analyzing, and critiquing them. The very best students come up with

stories that surprise me. And many of the answers are a joy to read – some read like film scripts, fairy tales, or political pamphlets. The format is also popular with students. According to my informal survey, 35% of 40 respondents said they “loved it,” while 57% called it “an interesting experiment” which they were prepared to try again. Only 4% of students wanted to go back to more traditional forms of exams.

This format is obviously not a panacea. There must be many political science courses that cannot be examined this way. The format may also be biased, or unreliable, in ways I haven’t considered. For example, I have yet to find out whether my colleagues would grade the answers the same way I do. These exams obviously reward students who are good writers, but those who are not can legitimately rely on AI for help. The same is true for students whose first language is not English. There is no doubt that the format can be expanded and improved in a number of ways. But one thing is certain: The advent of artificial intelligence means that we have no choice but to try new things. And let’s be honest, university teaching was well overdue for a bit of a shakeup anyway.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Member Announcements

Lauren Bell, Allison Rank, and Carah Ong Whaley will publish an edited volume in July 2024, [*Civic Pedagogies: Teaching Civic Engagement in an era of Divisive Politics*¹⁶](#) with Palgrave Macmillan. Several PSE section members contributed chapters, and the authors “offer innovative pedagogies and praxis grounded in political and civic theories aimed at strengthening democratic norms, practices and institutions.”

Daniel Casey published “[ChatGPT In Public Policy Teaching And Assessment: An Examination Of Opportunities And Challenges](#)”¹⁷ in the Australian Journal of Public Administration.

Call for Contributors

Bobbi Gentry and Shamira Gelbman are coediting “Youth Activism in America: an Encyclopedia of Ideals in Action for ABC-CLIO.” They are seeking contributors of short (250-500 word) entries on a variety of topics in youth activism in the United States. If you’re interested in contributing, please email them at gelbmans@wabash.edu or bgentry@bridgewater.edu.

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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

¹⁶ <https://link.springer.com/book/9783031551543>

¹⁷ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8500.12647>

welcome. Research notes in this newsletter should be considered as working papers and have received editorial review but have not undergone peer review.

The general policy of this newsletter is to publish all teaching-related articles that are submitted, as much as possible. We will, however, offer suggested revisions to improve the quality of the presentation, to verify academic integrity and citation standards, and to make the writing more accessible. We may occasionally require significant revisions or require authors to hold their submissions until a later issue, in order to ensure that ideas will be suitably ready for distribution, and we may occasionally refer articles or research notes to better-suited outlets.

Submission deadline is April 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.

Important Note: This will likely be the last edition of the Political Science Educator to have a print/PDF edition; with section approval at the 2024 business meeting, the newsletter intends to move toward online publishing only via APSA Educate (on the same biannual schedule).

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All address corrections should be sent directly to APSA.