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# Introduction

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

While education departments have long studied methods of teaching, strategies for implementing high-impact practices, tactics for assessment and the design of syllabi and various other course materials in their efforts to train future primary and secondary teachers, other academic disciplines have failed to focus on such skills—even in doctoral programs. Faculty in political science spent their college careers learning about the discipline. Across the subfields, higher education has shown a remarkable ability to produce subject-matter experts. Today's instructors unquestionably leave graduate school knowing a great deal about *what* they will be expected to teach, but, without taking education courses of their own volition, do they know *how* to teach it? While some programs have begun making concerted efforts to train teachers—as well as scholars—it still seems normal for students to enter academia with only minor experience as teaching assistants without formalized training. As a result, they are forced to teach themselves how to teach, typically relying on their own past experiences and the advice of those around them. In short, they learn as they go.

Nonetheless, the importance of teaching and learning has undeniably grown in the discipline in the past decade. National, regional and international political science conferences have recognized the value (in terms of both pedagogy and scholarship) of teaching and learning, and consequently have allocated time for tracks devoted to looking at what and how political scientists teach. For example, the Teaching and Learning Politics Group of the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) had five pedagogy-focused panels at its 2012 conference in Bordeaux; and the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association featured 11 panels covering teaching and learning in Chicago in 2014. At these conferences, best practices and ideas are disseminated and discussed in an effort to improve pedagogy within the political science classroom.

Moreover, the pedagogy of political science and international relations has become a conference theme in its own right. Eleven years ago, the American Political Science Association (APSA) hosted the inaugural Teaching and Learning Conference in Washington, DC. Recognizing the importance of the teacher–scholar model, APSA brought in 40 political scientists and graduate students to discuss approaches, techniques and methodologies for increasing student attainment in the political science classroom. Following this small pilot meeting, the conference celebrated its tenth anniversary in February 2014 with more than 300 attendees. Europe followed suit with the first Europe-wide teaching and learning conference for political scientists in Maastricht in June 2014, jointly organized by ECPR, the British International Studies Association (BISA), the Political Studies Association (PSA) in the UK and the UACES (the academic association for contemporary European Studies).

It has not been only through conferences that teaching and learning research has been shared with the discipline, however. In January 2005, the first issue of the *Journal of Political Science Education* was published, under the direction of John Ishiyama and Marijke Breuning at Truman State University. Held under the Undergraduate Education Section of APSA (with nearly 450 members), the journal has become an invaluable resource for instructors hoping to increase their understanding of evidence-based teaching techniques and curricular innovations. Other US-based journals (e.g. the *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, the *eJournal of Public Affairs*, *Perspectives on Political Science*) have similarly looked at issues concerning teaching and learning. While these journals have dedicated themselves to studying pedagogy in political science and international relations, *PS: Political Science & Politics* and *European Political Science* have long made efforts to include teaching and learning research in their publications. In Europe, the ECPR journal, *European Political Science*, not only regularly publishes articles on pedagogical issues, but, similarly to the British journal, *Politics*, produced a special teaching and learning issue in 2013.

For faculty, this new direction reflects a desire to improve teaching techniques and curriculum decisions—all in the effort to improve student learning within political science and international relations programs. Perhaps even more importantly, this line of research has permitted faculty who are asked to focus primarily on teaching to maintain a strong research agenda without having to stretch themselves thin worrying about pedagogical research being undervalued. Teaching and learning research, rather, may be viewed as even more valuable in teaching-centered institutions. In short, the past ten years have demonstrated a recognized effort to better understand political science pedagogy.

Nonetheless, while our discipline has taken great strides in the past decade to give value to the scholarship of teaching and learning, conference presentations and journal articles tend to focus more on the results of pedagogical experiments than the nuts and bolts of how to transfer them into other classrooms. Indeed, they already presuppose a certain level of pedagogical knowledge. As a result, they may not, on face value, be as useful for new instructors or those searching for new inspiration and ideas after years of teaching. Moreover, conference papers and journal articles disseminate information regarding whether some method successfully impacted student learning, but less attention is typically paid to applicability to different settings and procedures for applying the method to another classroom. Other efforts, such as the biannual ECPR Teaching and Learning Summer School, are more helpful in this respect, but they can only impact a small number of scholars at a time.

## GOALS OF THE HANDBOOK

We find it important to reach out to as many as our colleagues as possible. Therefore, this handbook aims to speak to all faculty in political science and international relations—from those nervously entering a classroom for the first time in their lives to those who seemingly etched their first lecture on a stone tablet. Authors have been asked to write to both a novice and experienced audience and to attempt to provide concrete examples of best practices as much as possible. Given our stated concerns regarding the pedagogical

preparation of new instructors in political science and international relations, the scope of the book is intended to allow first-time instructors to read on a particular topic, understand its importance and pull useful ideas that could be utilized within their own classroom. We do not suggest that these chapters represent an exhaustive coverage of any particular topic. Instead, we recognize that different faculty who read will have their own ideas or tidbits related to the material covered. In this way, we simply hope that the handbook will serve as a base on which faculty (both rookies and veterans alike) can build. In other words, knowing that much of what faculty in political science and international relations do in the classroom has been borrowed and adapted from others, we hope that the handbook will succeed in planting seeds and introducing new strategies and tactics of learning that will spur further innovation. In addition, this handbook has been designed to account for teaching at institutions of various levels—from small, private liberal arts colleges in the USA to research-intensive universities across Europe. And we have attempted to assure that materials can be taken and used in instructors' own classrooms.

## APPROACH OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is committed to the principles of student-centered education, in which instructors move beyond traditional lecture-style information delivery toward a more participatory and interactive learning environment. Thus, learning no longer focuses on information transfer and instructors cease to be the sage on the stage. Rather, they become a guide on the students' side.

The popularity of student-centered instruction in the past decades stems from its superior ability over traditional lecturing or teacher-centered instruction in fostering both the motivation and the preparation of students. As such, it has proven more effective in fostering deep learning. Deep learning, as opposed to surface learning, points beyond the mere memorization of information and aims to enable students to understand and reflect on the meaning of new information, relate it to previous knowledge, practice and experience, and to differentiate between evidence and information (Ramsden 1988; Weimer 2002).

Much of the pedagogical research related to political science and international relations has focused on student-centeredness and such deep learning. While the imparting of content knowledge remains highly relevant, there are increased calls for adequately preparing students to be able to read, write and exercise sound critical thinking. Deep learning can be fostered only by developing students' skills as well as subject knowledge. Additionally, given the fundamental ideals surrounding the study of government and politics, our particular discipline is one in which writing, reading and creative thinking should play a fundamental role when determining successful student outcomes. And students should leave with a sense of self-efficacy, prepared and able to apply these skills to the content knowledge disseminated throughout their time in school or to new information shared at their workplace.

Thus student-focused education actively involves students in the learning process. Political science and international relations is well suited to assure students have numerous opportunities to apply their classroom knowledge. Given the significant number of

governmental bodies, non-profit organizations and agencies impacting political decisions across the world, it is not surprising that internships are a ripe learning opportunity for students in political science and international relations. In many cases, undergraduates can undertake numerous internships over their academic careers (at varying levels and branches of government) in an effort to discover where they believe they would most enjoy attempting to work post graduation.

Nor are these internships necessarily tied to the student's individual country. Study-abroad opportunities permit students to experience government work in other nations (or with international organizations). Through these experiences, students become active participants in their education and gain knowledge that cannot be simply explained in a textbook or via a lecture. While internships and study abroad are prime examples of deep learning, they may not be possible for all students. Simulations held within a class can help provide students with a more practical understanding of what they are studying. Model United Nations, Model Arab League and mock legislatures are regularly used campus wide, while numerous other class-based simulations have been created to help make politics real for students.

Likewise, students in political science and international relations can easily participate in community-integrated learning (also referred to as community service, experiential learning or service learning). In this environment, colleges and universities partner with organizations within their community to give students opportunities to exercise classroom knowledge in projects designed to assist some facet of life in their society. Beyond helping town-gown relationships, the projects offer the students the potential for great meaning. If community-integrated learning is not possible in a given context, political science and international relations opens numerous doors for extracurricular activities for students to participate in—including, but not limited to, guest speakers, public meetings and campaign events. Lastly, political science and international relations have proven to be fertile ground for both capstone projects within disciplines and more generalized undergraduate research. As a discipline that is impacted hourly by events in the world, political science and international relations offer regular opportunities for new questions and techniques—not all of which require a graduate degree or formal methods of training to be meaningfully explored.

When students 'learn by doing' inside or outside the classroom, their motivation and preparation, which are crucial for learning to take place, are likely to improve markedly. Moreover, since learning-centered instruction assumes different levels of knowledge and skills on the part of the learners, it can be a successful resolution of the instructor's dilemma of often having to teach three courses at once for the average, advanced and struggling students. It does so by recognizing that everyone brings different knowledge and skills to the learning process and that learning is—or can be—a joint, interpersonal effort (Huba and Freed 2000, p. 33).

Student-centered instruction requires a conceptual change from both the instructors and the students. When successful, such conceptual change covers the five cornerstones of student-centered education. First, the balance of power shifts from the instructors toward the students so that power is shared. Second, such a shift redefines the role of instructors into one in which they are primarily responsible for creating a successful learning environment and assessing whether learning is taking place, rather than whether teaching is well received. They become guides for students to reach a predetermined

outcome. Third, instructors no longer use assessment merely to grade students, but also to provide feedback and guidance in the learning process. Fourth, students' responsibility for their own learning increases. Finally, in this framework the function of content knowledge also changes, in that, besides establishing the foundation for further learning, it also becomes a means through which skills are developed (Weimer 2002; Huba and Freed 2000; Blumberg 2009).

## OVERVIEW OF SECTIONS

The chapters that follow have been broken into three sections. In the opening section, authors examine the macro-level of pedagogy in political science and international relations: curriculum and course design. Topics covered include undergraduate curriculum design, capstone courses, graduate curriculum design, professional development, distance learning, civic engagement, program assessment, performance assessment, course-based assessment, multidisciplinary, information literacy, the Bologna Process and promoting employability and job skills. The second section of the handbook moves to a meso-level, examining particular subject areas within political science and international relations. Subject areas examined in this section include the introduction to politics course, conflict, diversity, gender politics, undergraduate and graduate research methods, political theory, controversial topics, two-year institutions, international relations and teaching practitioners. These chapters provide broad overviews of strategies and tactics proven effective in the classroom. The final section takes us to the micro-level, focusing on techniques within the classroom that have the potential to be successful in assuring student learning. Techniques discussed include designing a syllabus, integrating technology, designing simulations, group work, team-based learning, problem-based learning, undergraduate research, experiential learning, utilizing literature and film, course-based writing, lecturing and classroom management, conducting scholarship related to teaching and learning and promoting student discussion.

## CONCLUSION

In short, this handbook has been compiled in order to fill a noted gap in the political science and international relations literature: it is a comprehensive, discipline-specific guide for faculty interested in becoming better teachers. While the past decade has brought forth a flurry of academic scholarship related to teaching and learning, graduate students and current faculty still must largely rely on materials prepared by non-political scientists when trying to hone their craft in the classroom. The handbook has been put together with the intention of being accessible regardless of years in the classroom, type of institution or familiarity with the concepts covered. In short, we hope that readers of our handbook will emerge better teachers.

## REFERENCES

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