How to Teach American Politics (and Other Subjects) Effectively

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Thanks!

It's presumptuous for anyone to write about how to teach effectively! But after several decades of leading my department's graduate seminar on how to teach, I decided it was time to share these ideas with grad students and faculty members who, like so many of us, have benefited from excellent training in political science research but have found themselves armed with only the "throw them into the deep end of the pool and hope for the best" method of teacher training.

Effective teaching is especially important to those of us in political science because we teach subjects – politics, governance, democracy, authoritarianism – that are vital to everyone in our world, not excepting ourselves and our families. We may be especially aware of the fragility of democracy now, but democratic systems are always fragile. Maintaining them requires work. So it isn't simply a privilege to teach political science. It's a necessity. Moreover, teaching it engagingly is a learned skill.

Please feel free to forward this booklet to anyone (or assign it to any class) who might be interested. My aim is to add to the dialogue on effective teaching, so I hope you'll give me as much feedback as you can on the suggestions I've made.

I'm most grateful to those who have commented on various parts of the booklet: Hal Bass, Ted Carmines, Jacek Dalecki, Audrey Haynes, Bob Huckfeldt, Rich Pacelle, Wayne Parent, Kyle Saunders, and especially to Ian Anson, Larry Baum, Paul Beck, Jack Bielasiak, Bruce Oppenheimer, and L.J. Zigerell, who survived the whole thing. I've also learned a lot about teaching from the grad students in the many teaching seminars I've taught at Indiana and from colleagues whose classes I've had the privilege of attending.

As always, my greatest debt is to my husband, Howard V. Hershey; our daughters and their partners – Katie and Jim Conlon, Lissa and David Evans, Lani Nguyen and Andrew Earnest, and Hannah Hershey and Michael Gerdjikian – and to our wonderful grandkiddos: Chloe, Parker, Dae'yana, Talan, and Jade Nguyen and Jack, Seamus, and Liam Conlon. Everything I do has been made possible by their love and support (not to mention their patience!).

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Introduction

It was my first teaching experience. A big Wisconsin horsefly whizzed through the open window of my summer class on American National Government. It buzzed loudly around the room a few times, barely missing some of my 45 undergraduate students. Then, after hovering briefly over my podium, it dropped dead. Right on my lecture notes. I think every student in that room felt a kinship with that horsefly.

Like most grad students in political science (and virtually every other academic discipline), I had learned a lot about doing publishable research, but I had never been given any training in teaching, even though that would be my day job for the coming decades. Many departments are working to remedy that lack now.

They should, because **good teachers are made, not born.** Having an outgoing personality can be an advantage, but it doesn't ensure that you'll communicate effectively about political science. There's no one single pattern to follow to teach effectively. You have the freedom to develop an effective teaching style that's most comfortable for you. Some teachers become very effective lecturers. Others feel more comfortable teaching through discussion. Some great teachers use examples from their personal lives to make their points; others are strictly impersonal. Each of these approaches to teaching has strengths and weaknesses. Over time, you'll discover what *your* strengths as an instructor are.

You can learn how to teach well with a bit of effort. If you complete your first semester of teaching and find you haven't enjoyed it, don't panic; not many of us enjoy doing things we haven't been properly trained for. You may discover that you like it much better once you feel more comfortable in the role. You may also find that you can exert great influence as a teacher – perhaps even more than by publishing in an academic journal read by not as many people. (You can, of course, optimize your impact by doing both!)

Teaching gives you the opportunity to increase the knowledge and capability of a group of citizens. Your class may be the last chance we have to motivate future business people, journalists, health care providers, and sales people to think systematically about the nature and challenges of a democratic system and their part in it. That's a rare chance to make a difference.

Even for those who see themselves primarily as researchers, learning to teach effectively can help us better explain our research in publications and at conferences. For those of you who haven't gotten that training – and for those who would appreciate a little refresher – I've put together this guide to teaching. I teach American politics, so that's where I'll draw most of my examples, but the same principles should apply to other subjects.

So let's start at the beginning: What should we hope to accomplish in teaching undergraduates?

1/ What's the Purpose of Our Undergraduate Teaching?

If your class is typical, it's composed mainly of political science majors, some prospective majors, and a few students who needed a class at 1 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The great majority **do NOT hope to become a professional political scientist**; very few undergraduates will go to grad school in political science.

All of them, however, are consumers of politics and will be throughout their lives. They are the targets of politics, observers of it, and occasional participants. Political decisions will shape their futures. A democratic system needs informed citizens: people who understand how the system works and what can be done when it doesn't.

Necessarily, then, **our undergraduate classes differ from the grad seminar we took on that topic**. You have been steeped in the canon of our discipline: the major works and their findings. The canon is valuable in helping us as political scientists organize all this information.

We present that canon – those main ideas – from a different perspective when we talk to undergraduates. We do well to convey those ideas with the aim of informing these citizens (and non-citizens) about their own roles in whatever political processes we teach about.

In teaching about organized interests, for example, I'll want to present E. E. Schattschneider's (1975) idea of the mobilization of bias not just for its own sake, but to show my students why interest groups form, what they look like in practice, why some groups wield more political clout than others, what's the evidence that they "buy votes" in government, how they are regulated, and why they are not regulated more.

I'll want to acquaint them with Mancur Olson's (1971) idea of "free riders" not so much to help them trace its evolution through generations of articles in political science journals but to encourage them to see why some types of interest groups face very different environments and incentives than do many business interest groups and what differences that makes in terms of their fund-raising, public behaviors, and ability to represent their constituencies.

I'll want to urge my students to unlearn their stereotypes of pressure groups and think about ways in which political action committees, labor unions, lobbyists for state and local and foreign governments, and social movements affect the types of policies we get and the type of democracy we have. I'll want them to ask whether a democratic polity could exist without organized interests, and how the problems they see with interest groups could be reduced.

In the process, I hope, they'll come to see the value of insights such as Schattschneider's and Olson's. But I hope they'll see them as a source of ideas to use as they navigate their many roles in politics, whether or not they go on to get a graduate degree in political science.

You'll need to begin a course by creating a syllabus. It is the foundational tool that structures the course for you and your students. The more effort you put into its creation, the better the foundation of the course.

2/ How to Put Together a Syllabus

You've probably seen the cartoon of the instructor facing students on the first day of class, wearing a t-shirt that states, "READ THE SYLLABUS!" Maybe you even have the t-shirt. There's a reason for that. **The syllabus is the constitution of your class**; it contains all or most of the important rules students will need to know. Some schools consider it to be legally binding.

The problem here, of course, is that most of them *don't* read it. But that doesn't mean it's unimportant. Just as most of our students haven't read the U.S. Constitution, their lives are still powerfully affected by it. So creating a syllabus is a vital task. **It should be full and detailed**, not just as a teaching tool and reminder of due dates, but also for legal reasons: if a student says later that you didn't announce that late papers would be penalized one letter grade, it's best to have it on record that you did.

You don't have to re-invent the wheel. Colleagues have put thousands of syllabi online. One or more of your colleagues may have taught the course before. Your professional association may have syllabus collections, as the American Political Science Association does (see, for example, APSA undated). Google is another useful source.

Read several syllabi to derive ideas for yours. (Be sure to ask the author for permission if you use language from someone else's syllabus.) Even better, make use of the greatest blessing of academia: the gift of autonomy, and create your own, this way:

You've been assigned to teach, say, The U.S. Congress. DON'T start by looking back over your notes for the grad seminar on Congress you took. Instead, ask yourself: **What are the most important concepts that my non-grad-student undergrads need to know about Congress, to function as citizens of a democracy?** What are the biggest ideas that I want them to understand about Congress?

Here are some: What did the writers of the Constitution think Congress ought to do to protect this new democracy? How did the purposes of the House differ from those of the Senate? How has their functioning changed over time? What does it mean to "represent" people? How are members of Congress chosen? What sorts of people are they, and why does it matter what sorts of people they are? What has Congress actually done and what has it sidestepped? How has its relationship to the presidency changed over time? Does it function differently in domestic policy than in foreign policy? Is Congress always gridlocked, and if not, why is this happening now? How does public opinion value Congress (and why doesn't it)? Are there ways to change Congress, and for what purposes?

Here's where the gift of autonomy comes in: **You get to decide which of these big ideas to cover** in your course and in what order. You can, of course, give special emphasis to the topics you know the most about and those you find especially interesting. Once you choose the big ideas you want to address, then **they become the sub-sections of your syllabus**.

You'll have about 14 weeks to present these ideas. At two class days per week, that's 28 opportunities for you to convey the big ideas, minus exam days and holidays. **Pick a specific question to address on each of those class days.** For instance, if the first big idea you want to address is what the writers of the Constitution intended Congress to do, the first day could cover the influences, from Americans' experience with the British government prior to the Revolution to the legislatures created by the several colonies, that led writers to debate what Congress should be charged with doing. The second day could ask what was actually written into the new Constitution and why those ideas won out. **It helps to phrase the topic of that class day in the form of a question**, which you plan to answer by the end of class that day.

In writing the syllabus, on the top of page 1, include your name, contact info, the class name, time, and location, and your office hours. It will also help your students to plan their time if you then include, in a box or some other means to draw attention to it, the **important dates** in the semester: due dates, exams, and the time and place of the final exam. You can format this as a checklist to help students keep track of their progress.

Then offer a brief introduction to the subject matter of the class, intended to excite their interest. What do you aim for them to know when they complete the course? What questions do you want them to be able to answer? What skills do you want them to develop or refine? How does an understanding of the course material help students to navigate their world?

Consider publishing your syllabus online only. That saves a lot of paper. Audrey Haynes suggests getting students to read the syllabus by embedding a piece of information on a particular topic in it that you'll include as a bonus question on the first exam. Tell the students to look for it.

Know Your Academic Environment

Academic institutions differ. Some of us teach at small liberal arts colleges or elite universities. Others teach at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Some hold appointments at community colleges, others at huge state universities. **Each of these institutions has its own culture.** If you did your graduate work at an R1 institution and TA'd for classes of 100+ students with a wide range of backgrounds and skills, you'll face a very different environment if you move to a small college where a "large" class is 20 students whose backgrounds range from small towns in the center of the state to small towns in the south-center of the state.

There's good sense in the adage, "Bloom where you're planted." If you teach at a liberal arts college the way you were taught at Enormous State University, you and your students will have one hell of a time blooming.

One of the best ways to understand your environment is to **talk with your departmental colleagues who have taught there longer.** How many pages of reading do they assign per week, on average? Is it customary to give multiple-choice questions or essay exams? How much leeway do colleagues at your rank in your department have to negotiate their teaching load and course assignments? If you're teaching a large intro course, are you expected to use a standard syllabus shared by all the course's instructors? How extensive are the support services for students? How many out-of-class obligations (readings courses, internship supervision, and so on) are colleagues in your rank expected to take on? Will your department benefit with increased enrollments if your course meets the criteria for designation as a writing-intensive class or some other institutional requirement?

Go ahead and innovate. New and effective ideas can be a tonic for a department. But keep in mind that each college and university is its own universe, with its own resources, norms, and range of students. Start by understanding where you're planted.

How to Choose the Readings

Now that you've laid out the structure of your course – the main sections of material you'll cover, the class days and the specific topics they will address – you need a set of readings. List them near the beginning of your syllabus.

Here are some things NOT TO DO in selecting readings. **Do not assign articles from professional political science journals to undergraduates**. Those of us who write them are not Hemingway or Mark Twain. The fact that you suffered through political science prose as a grad student does not entitle you to expose others to it. Your students will not give a flying **** what percent of the variance was explained by which variables or the benefits of structural equations. Of course you'll want to keep your students well-informed about what recent political science research has taught us about your topic. But you can do that more digestibly through the material you present in lecture.

A textbook is a logical choice, because it is intended to put relevant information in context, in a logically-arranged format. Which textbook? Choose a topic with which you're very familiar and then read the chapter on that topic across all the texts you're considering. Pick the text you feel most comfortable with. Be sure to find out its cost (which is likely to be outrageous) and find out if cheaper options (such as rentals) are available.

If you choose something other than (or in addition to) a textbook, be prepared to explain to your students how the various readings relate to your course and to one another. Books of readings can be helpful, but they often don't contain such explanations. It may seem obvious to

you that the book you've assigned about passing an interesting budget bill is intended as a case study of how Congress works in practice. It may not be as obvious to your students, some of whom may think of it as a stand-alone set of information.

How much reading? You may have been assigned 5 books in your undergrad classes a while ago, but the cost of academic publications doesn't permit that now[1], nor will your students be willing to do that much reading. Your colleagues may assign anywhere from 50-150 pages a week, depending on how tightly-written the readings are. For summer classes, assign fewer; the number of class days may be the same as in a regular semester, but there will be fewer days between classes for students to complete the readings.

Your students may enjoy reading assigned articles in public journals or magazines or newspapers. Make sure the articles aren't behind a paywall and that you aren't breaking copyright laws. Link to them in the syllabus; don't add them later during lecture when not all students are present. **Think of your completed syllabus as a contract, not a work in progress**. Procrastinate while writing your first novel; not having your syllabus ready for the first day of class just makes you look disorganized and disinterested.

Tests

Your syllabus should include the dates of the tests, a brief description of their format, and whether they are cumulative or cover only material since the last exam. Choose a format based on the types of skills you want to assess.

The most basic skill is ***retention of material***: have students absorbed important information from lectures and readings? **Multiple choice questions** are used primarily to test a student's immediate retention: whether students have reviewed lecture material and done the readings. Retention isn't a trivial skill. In many real-life situations, all students need is the ability to recognize the right answer, rather than to come up with it on their own.

The greatest utility of multiple-choice questions is the speed with which they can be graded. Your institution may have a scoring center that provides an item analysis, which can tell you, for instance, what percentage of the class got each question correct. Then, when you hand back the exams, if a student complains that an item was too hard, you can cite these percentages to show that (we hope) most students in the class did get it right. If too few students chose the right answer, and especially if the item discriminated poorly – if those scoring lower on the test as a whole were as likely to get the item right as those scoring highest – you may want to drop that item from students' scores.

Multiple-choice questions have multiple drawbacks. If the wording of the response options isn't clear, some students will make assumptions that lead them to choose the wrong response. Multiple-choice tests can also be gamed; strategic thinkers know that the longest response option (the one with the most words) is most likely to be correct, because instructors

tend to qualify their correct statements. Response (c) or 3 is most likely to be correct. When one question contains "all of the above" or "none of the above" as a response option and other questions don't, that's the correct answer.

Here's how to write a good multiple-choice test question. First, **ask about important ideas, not about smaller matters such as correct dates.** One method is to start with a statement about a topic ("Which of the following is accurate about campaign finance?") followed by one true statement and three statements that are the opposite of true, so the answer is not ambiguous. That combines multiple-choice and true-false, with the advantage over standard true-false tests that the student has less than a 50-50 chance of picking the right answer by chance. All response options should be about the same length.

Write as many questions as you have minutes in that part of the test (e.g., 30 minutes? 30 questions). Urge students not to linger on any question. Although research has disconfirmed the idea that changing an answer on a multiple-choice test generally leads to a wrong answer (see, for example, Ludy et al., 1984), these items are best at testing immediate recognition.

I find it helpful to reassure students that there will be no "trick" questions on any exam. I have no clue why they would expect some, but many do. You might point out that you've worded questions to be as clear and straightforward as possible, so if any students think they've caught some tricky wording, either they've misread the question or they haven't studied enough.

Keep in mind that multiple-choice questions are not more "objective" than essay questions. They're just different. The subjectivity in essay questions comes in grading them; the subjectivity in multiple-choice questions comes in writing them.

A second vital skill is ***comprehension of material***. You can test for this by including **short essays or identifications** in your exams. List a series of important terms. (You may provide a longer list prior to the test, to aid in studying.) Ask students to write a few sentences about each, defining the term and stating one reason why it's important to the topic of your class. This method goes beyond simple recognition to determine whether students can explain the content and importance of a key term or idea. Short essays or IDs are easy to write (choose the important terms you've discussed in class) and easy to grade, because the answers are brief.

You can also use **longer essay questions** to test comprehension. They can provide a fuller test of the student's comprehension than an ID (because it's possible to memorize an ID's definition and its significance without understanding it well). They give brighter students a chance to shine.

On the other hand, they're harder to write and grade than an ID is. Because of the time needed to answer them, they limit you to asking about only one or a few topics, whereas IDs can focus on several. The grader may be influenced by the student's writing skills as well as the content of the essay – a problem especially in grading essays by international students.

You can make essay questions easier to grade and more tangent-proof by **breaking each question into sub-questions** to help students structure their answer. After a prompt about political party organization, for instance, you can include three sub-questions: (a) define and explain the particular concept involved, (b) compare it to something else discussed in class, and (c) elaborate on why the concept matters with respect to some larger issue (representation, the impact of institutional rules, policy-making in Congress).

Using sub-questions in an essay question **also makes the essay easier to grade** and comment on. For example, "part (a) is fine; you could use more specific examples in part (b), and you might consider such-and-such in part (c)."

It helps to prepare students for this type of essay question in advance, in class. Pose a sample essay to the class and have the students brainstorm an answer to each sub-question. Write their responses on a slide or on the board. That lets you show how much detail you're looking for and to point out how their answers to the sub-questions are linked.

A third goal to assess is whether the student can ***demonstrate insight***: put together course material in a way that goes beyond re-presenting the material. This is generally done by using longer-form essay questions. To me, it's ideal if a student can, for instance, apply a concept learned in one part of the course to material provided in another part, or apply a standard used in the class to a new topic. For instance, you might ask students to compare primaries with caucuses in terms of voter turnout and representation, and then go on to consider how using primaries rather than caucuses might affect the representation of younger partisans, or some other issue to which you haven't specifically given the answer in class.

Many instructors had to use **open-book exams** while teaching online during the pandemic and found that they preferred reading such exams. Copying a correct answer from an open book or class notes can reinforce their learning. On the other hand, students aren't as likely to review any course material other than that asked specifically on the exam. You can choose which matters more to you: reinforcing a smaller amount of learning or hoping for more.

Ideally, we can take account of students' varying test-taking skills by using exams that incorporate all of these methods and more. Here's "more:"

Research Papers and Other Assignments Likely to Promote Learning

Because some students are better at taking tests than others are, it's helpful to include other means of evaluation too. Most of us were probably assigned The Term Paper as undergrads: research something and write about it, usually the night before it was due. But that suggests a problem with The Term Paper: it often becomes a cut-and-paste job put together quickly, at best, and at worst, it offers an opportunity for plagiarism.

Let's take the latter issue first. There are ample websites out there offering The Term Paper for free (or for a fee) on a variety of subjects. You can keep your students from becoming consumers of these sites in several ways.

- Make the assignment very specific, so that a ready-made paper isn't likely to be available.

- Pose a series of specific questions the paper should answer.

- Offer students some topics to choose among, rather than ask them to select their own.

- Have the paper due in several segments: first, a topic statement and preliminary bibliography, which you can return with suggestions of sources and how to narrow or broaden their topic; second, a literature review on the topic; third, their own findings, and finally, their conclusions and implications. Most students who purchase a term paper don't do so till close to the due date, so having to meet multiple due dates should deter them from doing so. This also lets students take into account the feedback you've given them on earlier segments of the paper.

- Change your topic each semester. That's hard; we can become fond of a given research assignment. But it tends to disproportionately advantage students associated with sororities, fraternities, and other places that keep exam and assignment files.

Research papers can be good learning tools. Because they invite students to delve more deeply into a specific topic, students can gain a sense of mastery, which engages them with the course. Even better, it gives them practice in doing research, a skill they will need as citizens.

Students can get practical experience with social science methods by having to create a hypothesis about the subject of the class, locate data to test it, and draw their own conclusions. Most students will not have experienced doing data analysis before, so you'll need to devote additional class time to taking them through its steps, to explain why asking their roommates' opinions on a topic does not constitute a public opinion survey, and so on. But it can be worth the time.

You can gain the advantages of a research paper in other ways. **Here are some devices to engage students in more active learning about a topic**:

- Create **group projects that don't require them to depend on other group members**. For instance, in a class on indigenous people's rights, Brandon Miliate divided the class (n=30) into six groups of five students each at the beginning of the semester and assigned each group an indigenous population in some area of the world. Its task was to research that population and then, when the instructor brought up a new issue that indigenous groups face, each group reported on how that issue

was manifest in its own indigenous population. Finally, each student wrote an individual paper on one of the topics. (The latter limits the most common complaint about group projects: the presence of free riders.)

- Assign **case studies**, in which each student applies a central concept of the course to a particular situation, group, institution, or event.

- In a class on voting or public opinion, have students write and administer a **survey** to some group, examine the results, and report them (even, as Mike Wagner of Wisconsin has, in a press conference for local reporters and the student newspaper).

- Conduct a **simulation** for one class day, several days, or even for the whole semester. The advantage of simulations is that they stimulate enthusiasm and commitment. The disadvantage is that they take more time than lectures do. So you face a tradeoff between the volume of ideas that could be conveyed and the depth of student engagement in a smaller number of those ideas. On setting up a classroom simulation, see Pacelle (1989), APSA (2011), Glasgow (2015), Fliter (2021), and Watson (2022).

- A quickie simulation: For one class period, or even for part of a class period, divide the class into several groups and assign each group the role of an organized interest or group within Congress or public opinion. Ask them to respond to the issue from the perspective of that particular group. They could discuss their group's response during the class period prior to presenting it or simply respond individually without prior discussion. This can help you show that a particular issue can be defined in several different ways, that different groups hold different definitions, and that the conflict among them isn't simple bickering but rather a desire to get their definition accepted because they, or the principles they represent, will benefit as a result.

- Assign students to **apply a concept they learned in class to an example different** from the cases mentioned in class.

- Write an **argument paper**: Take a particular issue and argue one side OR both sides. This can often be preceded or followed by:

- Hold a class **debate or discussion**. Students can be divided into two or more groups and assigned to argue a particular side, with each participant required to make at least one discrete point. Debates in class normally require a day to set them up, so they're costly in time. But as with simulations, they can generate excitement. Try assigning students to defend a position opposed to the view they actually hold.

- Require **participant observation** (e.g., in a campaign or an organized interest) followed by writing a paper answering certain questions derived from class content about the experience.

- Take an **oral history** of someone involved in a local party organization, an elected or appointed office, or some type of organized interest or social movement and add context and interpretation.

- After holding a group discussion in class on an issue or concept, ask students to prepare individual papers offering various groups' views on the question. Or use a media clip as a stimulus to which students respond individually (either orally or in writing) or first in groups and then individually.

- **Review students' notes occasionally**, to find out whether they're writing down the main points and absorbing them accurately. You can ask for notes from some proportion of class members every week or so. Be sure to return them promptly.

- Requiring **book reviews** can further comprehension, though of course lots of book reviews are available on the Internet, for students seeking a shortcut.

- Assign **"minute papers"** in class: Ask students, either at the end of class or at the conclusion of a particular point in lecture, to re-present the main point. A quick reading of these short papers can help you learn whether the point got across and what aspects of it may have confused more than one student.

- Have each student write a hypothetical **dialogue** between two major political figures or exponents of particular ideas.

- Create a **podcast or vlog**, either individually or in small groups, about a particular event that demonstrates a concept explored in class.

- Assign a project tailored to the specific content of your class. In a course on judicial politics, for instance, organize a simulation of the Supreme Court (see Pacelle, 1989) or take the class (if permitted) to observe a local court case and write individual papers about the larger issues involved or answer questions about the roles of the judge, the prosecutor, and the defense attorney in presenting alternative views.

- Hold a **moot court** case on an intriguing topic that raises important conceptual questions. For instance, the Supreme Court says that if the state of Maine uses taxpayer money to pay for students attending nonreligious private schools, then it must allow taxpayer funds to pay for students to attend religious schools as well or violate the First Amendment. In such cases, does it still violate the First Amendment for the state to tax these private religious schools (see Totenberg, 2022)? This activity will appeal especially to students aiming for law school.

Both **you and your students benefit when you have more (and more various) measures of their learning**. Give more short assignments and tests rather than fewer big ones. The shorter assignments let you give more frequent feedback to each student, and because they're shorter, it's quicker for you to provide that feedback than to assess a term paper. Have at least one of those short assignments due early in the semester, so that students don't have to wait till midterms to find out that they need to work harder – or that they're in the wrong course.

When you present the requirements of your class, **state clearly the grading standards** you will use. What percentage of the grade will each paper count? Each test? Will attendance or participation be taken into account in the grade, and what percentage will be allotted to it? Will any other elements be included in the final grade? If you have a rubric for grading (e.g., what you'll look for in awarding an A, etc.), this is a good place to state it (see "Grading" below).

In Your Syllabus, Be Sure to Include "The Rules"

As a political scientist, you know that the rules structure individuals' behavior. For that reason alone, they deserve to be stated explicitly in your syllabus – not right at the beginning, but later in the syllabus. Some points to include:

- Your institution will likely have a **code of student conduct. Excerpt from it** what your students can expect of you and what you expect of them. Some institutions may mandate the specific language you need to use in this section.

- State specifically what constitutes **cheating and plagiarism** in your class, both in the syllabus and in class when you discuss written assignments. Many students come from environments in which cheating is commonplace. They probably know that they can't legitimately copy someone else's answers. But if they cut and paste statements from a website without footnoting the source, will they get an F for the paper, a zero (which will probably make it difficult for them to pass the course), and/or a note to the Dean of Students? Will they need to rewrite the paper? Discuss with them when it's necessary to cite a source and how you'd like them to do so.

- State what happens when a student fails to show up for an exam or turn in a paper on time. Will the penalty be a whole letter grade, a certain number of points, or will you not accept late papers? If a student asks to take an Incomplete, under what circumstances will you accept that request?

- Will you incorporate **some measure of attendance or participation** in your grading? If it matters to you that students show up in class, then you need to include some indicator of this in your grading. Tell them what percentage and how it will be measured. If you measure attendance through in-class writing, be sure to do so on enough days so that a student will not lose a lot of points due to a random absence.

- If you measure attendance, will you require a written note to excuse a student who missed a class? You could eliminate the need for written excuses by dropping the first one or two absences when calculating a student's score. That way, you won't need to expose yourself to the impressive creativity of students' reasons for missing a class.

- We normally accept absences due to religious holidays. What about students on athletic teams who need to leave campus for games? Don't include a huge list of acceptable excuses, or you might imply that the rules matter more to you than the students. But it helps to consider these issues in advance, so you won't have to make a decision on the spur of the moment that students will regard as a precedent.

- If you choose to measure the quantity or quality of a student's participation, be sure to leave ample opportunity for class discussion and keep good notes about who participated on a given day. Think about the really good students who are too shy to raise their hands; are you prepared to give them a zero on class participation? If so, don't assign too many points to this category.

- Do you really want to include rules about which font size. type face, and margin size your students are required to use in their papers? If so, have at it. If not, at least one student will probably ask about it; it's OK to say that you don't care!

Remember that **you don't need to respond to a student's request at the moment it's asked.** If a student requests a makeup final exam due to having booked non-refundable plane tickets to Aruba on the day the exam is scheduled, you can consider the request for a day or so, rather than set a precedent you may later regret. Ask that any such requests be made in writing.

Suggest (or At Least Identify) Sources of Help

Some students' writing skills may startle you. We all have good writing skills; that's one of the reasons we were admitted to grad school! But **many students have not had much practice researching and writing papers** in high school or in previous college classes. They may have trouble identifying or honing a topic and finding sources. If your institution's library has subject-matter specialists, you can ask one to come to your class and talk about the types of sources available in the library.

Younger instructors, and especially female instructors, may find that some students come to them with **non-academic challenges**. It's helpful to keep a list of resources for help with mental health needs, abuse, bullying, financial difficulties, international students' issues (such as visas and language capabilities), writing and grammar skills, and other societal issues. Many of our students are old teenagers, and they deal with the same issues that their counterparts deal with outside of universities. If all of this sounds weird to you, then don't worry; you aren't likely to be one of those faculty members asked for help.

In sum, your syllabus should contain basic information about the course including your contact info, an enticing introduction, the books and articles required (and recommended), other requirements (tests, papers, other assignments) students will need to meet, the sub-sections of the course followed by a specific list of class dates, substantive topics, and readings, and the rules by which the class will be conducted. For additional suggestions on writing a good syllabus, see Johnson (2006) and Gannon (2018). Yes, it's a pain. But once you've done it, you can then use it for semesters to come, with incremental changes.

3/ Preparing Your Lectures

The Imposter Syndrome

Teaching can be very ego-involving. **New instructors worry about how to present themselves:** Will students like me? Will they think I'm a nerd? Do I have some odd mannerisms that I'm not aware of? Are my power points cool? Am I ready for this?

Thoughts such as these do you absolutely no good as an instructor. For one, there's nothing you can do about students' opinions of you; they'll think whatever they think. Second, you aren't there to make friends. When you give back the first set of exams, it will quickly become apparent that you are not their friend.

So how do you separate yourself, and your desire to make a good impression, from your tasks as an instructor? It's actually pretty easy. Human brains are not good at doing two things at once, no matter how much we like to think that we multi-task. You can focus on the material you're teaching or whether you're having a bad hair day, but not both. So focus on the material you're teaching and let go of your thoughts about yourself. **If you concentrate on the topics you plan to address, you simply don't have the mental space to feel self-conscious**.

Many new instructors' worst fear is that a student will catch them in an error of fact. "Did you mean 2016, because Trump didn't run in 2012!" The answer is: "Yes, I did! Thanks for catching that!" Misstating a fact isn't terminal. Not knowing the answer to a student's question isn't a sin. You are not taking part in Trivia Night, when whoever knows the most factoids wins. **The strengths you bring as an instructor are not your grasp of micro-facts.**

If you're like most of us, especially as a new instructor, you're probably feeling a touch of the **Imposter Syndrome**: the feeling that you don't really belong in your present role and that somebody's going to find that out very soon. When you feel all alone with this distressing thought, consider:

> Some years ago, I was lucky enough to be invited to a gathering of great and good people: artists and scientists, writers and discoverers of things. And I felt that at any moment they would

> realise that I didn't qualify to be there, among these people who had really done things.
>
> On my second or third night there, I was standing at the back of the hall, while a musical entertainment happened, and I started talking to a very nice, polite, elderly gentleman about several things, including our shared first name. And then he pointed to the hall of people and said words to the effect of, "I just look at all these people and think, what the heck am I doing here? They've made amazing things. I just went where I was sent." And I said, "Yes, but you were the first man on the moon. I think that counts for something." [Neil Gaiman, referring to Neil Armstrong]

In other words, you are in good company.

Most of your students will probably accept your definition of yourself. Most of those who wouldn't, dropped out of high school or never entered college. **If you present yourself as a reasonably authoritative, reasonably confident leader of the class, most will accept you as such.** Similarly, if you present yourself as very nervous, easily embarrassed, and unprepared, they'll agree with you.

You have every reason to present yourself as reasonably authoritative and confident. You aren't at the podium because somebody grabbed you at Wal-Mart and said, "Help! We need somebody to teach Intro to American Politics – NOW!" You're the instructor for the class because you have extensive training in political science and your students haven't. That training prepares you to understand *context*. That training has given you some important *perspectives* on the nature of politics as a human activity. It leads you to ask how institutions make a difference in people's behavior, how individuals develop attitudes toward government and politics, and what difference their attitudes make.

Do you know everything about poli sci? Of course not! Neither did your faculty members in grad school, though some might have given that impression. Your grad training has taught you that there's a lot you don't yet know; that's one mark of understanding. But **you can offer students your ability to give them not just a bunch of facts but a set of categories and relationships that give these facts meaning.** You can go beyond events and beliefs to discuss the implications of various findings for the nature of representation, power, bias, and conflict.

That's what you bring to the table: these perspectives on big questions that we talk about all the time in graduate courses and in the professional literature. That's the strength that you should bring to lecturing, not your ability to list more correct facts about American presidents or international conflict than your students can.

When you discuss the Russian invasion of Ukraine, you can use it as a means to help students understand how wars create refugees, which affect the policies and economies of other nations, including the U.S. You can use it to show that democracies are not guaranteed to last forever, or that different actors try to promote differing definitions of a situation to further their own aims (e.g., Russia invaded to rid its neighbor of Nazis vs. Russia invaded to expand its own territory). If someone asks how long Putin has been in power, or what's the status of the invasion now, and you don't know, that's neither a criticism of you nor of your teaching. Just respond, "I don't know, but you can look that up," and go back to the point you're trying to make.

What Is a Lecture For?

Lecturing is not as dominant a teaching style as it used to be. Yet lecturing effectively can be a very productive and efficient way to teach (Regmi 2012). So how can you lecture effectively?

Lectures can best be used to present main themes – ideas or concepts. Lecturing is not about conveying as many details as possible within a 50-minute or 75-minute class. If you think about lecturing as a way to get across a detailed bunch of information, then your students are in the position of having to absorb that information – to write down a long list of facts – in a short time. In other words, you're giving dictation to them. Their ability to absorb the material will be limited by their ability to write fast and make quick distinctions between important information and supporting information about a topic they may not be very familiar with. That is a stressful and not very effective method of teaching.

If you want students to absorb an extensive amount of information, give it to them in the form of a reading. That way, they can go at their own pace, underline, and absorb. The nature of the reading – its use of subheads, topic paragraphs, topic sentences, boldface type, italics, and labeled definitions – can show them which are the important points and which are supporting evidence. We'll deal later with how to get students to do the readings.

When you teach through lecturing, your focus should be to get across the **most important organizing ideas about the topic for the day's class**. Another way of saying it is: teach concepts, or ideas, not facts. This also has the advantage of solving the problem I mentioned above: that you don't know everything about your topic, and sooner or later, one of your students may find you out. That's true. None of us **does** know everything about our topic. That doesn't discredit you as a teacher; it shows that you have bigger fish to fry.

If you're teaching about European politics, for example, you don't want to use valuable lecture time spouting a long list of facts: France has x number of administrative sub-units and cities, Germany elects the following officials,…. These lectures may be the only chance we get to introduce our students to complex and challenging ideas about the workings of actual democracies. Don't spend them trying to be a walking almanac.

Instead, you could talk about especially important dimensions on which major European political systems differ. How do they differ in the ways their citizens are represented in legislatures? What's proportional representation as compared with single-member district plurality systems, and what difference does that make in terms of how many parties a nation is likely to develop? Why is immigration a bigger issue in some European nations than others, and how does that affect the substance of their political campaigns and their policies?

Normally you'll want to present only a few main ideas or concepts in each lecture. As I'll elaborate below, you'll want to accomplish four things for each main idea. First, state the concept – define it, then spin it out a bit by providing details. Second, give an example that helps students get a picture of the idea in their minds. Third, connect the example back to the concept, so that students don't remember the example as a stand-alone topic. Fourth, communicate why the concept matters (for instance, that it helps us understand differences in the political life of different nations – or, as a last resort – that it will be on the test).

At What Level Should You Pitch Your Lecture?

One of the fundamental problems in teaching is making sure that you're "on the same page" as your students. If you begin your presentation at a point that's beyond their comprehension, then you're wasting your time and theirs.

Remember above all that **your students differ from you in systematic ways**. Most are old teenagers; they don't share your experiences. Most do not define a "good time" as having an exciting intellectual discussion. Don't aim your lectures at people who share your interests and your background.

That doesn't mean you have to begin your course at the most basic possible level; that would bore the stuffings out of the better students. You'll often hear the advice that you should aim your lecture at a level where about 80 percent of the students will understand it. It's never been apparent to me how you figure out where 80 percent of the students are or how that can be translated into actual lecture material.

So instead, **make sure that you define all the important terms you're using**. Your own background is that of a very knowledgeable, sophisticated specialist in your field. What you regard as obvious will not be obvious to many of your students. Some students in my own intro American politics classes have not been familiar with the meaning of the terms "incumbent" (see, for example, Michelson and Anagnoson, 2022) and "caucus." Just say, "As you know, an incumbent is someone who already holds a particular position." Otherwise, telling students that incumbents usually win elections doesn't convey much to them.

Be especially careful about defining terms in introductory courses. I discovered early in my teaching of Intro American Politics that to many of my students, "politics" was a synonym

for underhanded, crooked, and deceptive. Similarly, "critical thinking" meant learning to criticize. It helps to make sure you're all on the same page from the beginning!

Think carefully about the use of political science jargon. Does it benefit the student as a citizen to know what a particular term means? Understanding terms such as party identification and polarization will be helpful to them, as long as your definitions are comprehensible.

On the other hand, if you take your definition of polarization from a literature search, and you explain to first-year college students that, "Political polarization occurs when subsets of a population adopt increasingly dissimilar attitudes toward parties and party members (i.e., affective polarization), as well as ideologies and policies (ideological polarization)," you will cost yourself more time in having to explain your explanation than if you just tell them that polarization occurs when the identifiers and leaders of each party become more similar to one another in their political views and more different in views from the other party, as can be seen in recent years when the Republican Party has become more consistently conservative and the Democratic Party has become more liberal.

What works in a graduate seminar of academic specialists is not as well suited for a group of 18-year-olds. Even better, show them a picture, like the second image in this Pew Research Center piece from the mid-2010s: Polarization in American politics | Pew Research Center

How to Decide What to Talk About in a Lecture

In writing your syllabus, you've assigned a major topic for each class meeting. So your focus is already set. How do you choose specifically what to say that day about that day's topic?

Some new teachers have been advised that you should assign your students to read one book and draw your lectures from another book. Bad idea. Books can differ in their approaches and even in their facts; that can confuse students. Instead, work with the readings you've provided the students and supplement them for your lectures as needed.

Pick four or five main organizing ideas per lecture. In a shorter class, choose three or four. Students will remember only a part of what you tell them in lecture; your aim is to get them to recall the **important** points. So make it clear what those organizing ideas are.

How do you choose which organizing ideas to focus on? You have a lot of flexibility to select what you regard as most important. What are the three, four, or five ideas *you* consider most significant to your students about the topic of the day's class?

You could choose those organizing ideas by doing a quick review of the **professional literature**: what do we know the most about? From a different perspective, you could consider your overall **goals as a teacher**: How can you best help them understand how US politics works?

Here's an example. You're teaching Intro to American Politics, and today's lecture is about presidential nominations. What are the three or four or five most important ideas your students should know about that process to help them organize the facts they encounter about nominations? Those ideas could include:

1. **The nominating system has changed over time to include much more *public* participation**. The first presidential candidates were nominated by groups of Congress members and other prominent leaders. Later, in the early 1830s, groups of party activists pushed for national conventions, whose delegates were typically appointed by state party leaders. That, too, was decried as "boss rule" by reformers in the late 1800s, and the Progressive movement then pressed to let any party voters select their party's candidates in a primary (first) election. Especially after Democratic Party reforms following the 1968 elections, primaries have been used in most US elections. Thus, a much larger portion of the public has the right to participate in choosing party candidates now. **But ironically, we've found that most Americans aren't interested in doing so**; only a small minority of eligible voters takes part in most primaries.

2. **So what types of people *do* usually vote in primaries and, thus, decide who the parties' candidates will be?** Here, you can ask students for hypotheses: What are the characteristics of the people likely to take part? Instead of leaving it completely open, give them choices. More educated people or less educated people? And why? Then, when you develop a list of the characteristics associated with primary and caucus participation, ask how that might affect the types of people elected or the nature of representation. If you ask them to write their expectations down first, that may encourage them to take part in discussion.

3. **The nominating system is *state-based*. The party's voters in each state get to select the presidential candidate they prefer, and the delegates the party will send to its national nominating convention to vote for those candidates.** You could take this point in any of several interesting directions. You could remind students that this is one of the ways in which US democracy differs from many other nations, in that the US has a federal system where states get the right to make a lot of important decisions for themselves. Alternatively (or additionally), you could point out the complexity of the process. Each state gets to make its own rules for primaries and presidential nominations. If there are 50 different sets of state rules (which there are), then if one of your students ran a presidential campaign, he or she would have to spend a whole lot of time just understanding and complying with 50 different sets of rules. That advantages a better organized campaign with lots of well-trained workers.

4. **Primaries and caucuses are *sequential*. How does that affect the result?** There are lots of interesting implications here, but most important is that because the process takes place one or two or ten at a time over a five-month period, there's the opportunity for

momentum. The results of the earlier nomination events affect those that take place later. If we had a non-sequential process, such as a one-day national primary, how might the results differ? When all the voting takes place on the same day, then whoever is the front-runner in the polls prior to that day would probably win the nomination. Outsider and lesser-known candidates would be less successful.

5. **In summary, the U.S. nominating system has developed over time to permit widespread public participation in choosing candidates. Yet there's not nearly as much actual participation,** and that actual participation is dominated by upper-income, more educated, non-Hispanic white, and older people. Because the system is sequential and takes place over a five-month period, it tends to be characterized by momentum; Candidates need to do well in early nominating events or get winnowed out. It's state-based, so the makeup and concerns of the early states have a big impact on the outcome.

Conclude by summarizing and asking the "who cares?" question. How does the choice of this nominating system affect the types of candidates chosen? How does it affect the power of state relative to national party leaders and party identifiers in the electorate in selecting party candidates? How would American politics differ if the national parties' leaders chose the presidential candidates?

Now that you've selected the main points of the lecture, here is a simple formula as to how to present each idea: First, state the idea and explain it briefly. Second, give an example of this idea. Third, explicitly show how the example relates to the main idea. Fourth, state one or more consequences of that idea. Then restate the idea.

Most of the organizing ideas I've stated on presidential nominations don't require a lot of definitional work. One that does is the role of **momentum** (point #4 above).

1. State the idea and explain it briefly.

What's momentum? Your first impulse is probably to look at the literature on nominations for a definition. The literature has been written by professional political scientists for professional political scientists. As a result, it will often be somewhat jargon-filled. Your students may not be familiar with the jargon. So taking a definition directly from the literature will often require you to take additional time to explain the terms in the definition.

Don't give a highly abstract definition just because you think you ought to quote from the professional literature. Look at the literature, but make sure the definition you provide is understandable to students in your course. On momentum, the essence of the definition is that the results of one event in the nominating race affect the results of the next event. As a result, the early caucuses and primaries have disproportionate influence on the outcome.

Come in with your definitions already prepared. Write each definition on a slide or on the board as a complete thought. If you write a partial thought on the fly, you're less likely to present a description that will later help the student recall what you meant.

Then explain it briefly. Momentum refers to movement. We've mentioned that the nomination process is sequential; lots of events take place over a period of time. For several reasons, the headlines about the outcomes of early events can change the results in later events. One reason is that losing candidates in the early events usually find it harder to raise money, get less media coverage, lose support in the polls, and thus have a tougher time staying viable. So voters in later state primaries may find their choice of candidates narrowed, because some candidates didn't get momentum and already dropped out of the race.

Alternatively, the results of the early primaries may affect later ones because many party loyalists want to pick a likely winner, and they take the results of early primaries as indicators of winnability, or they simply recognize the front-runner's name because of the media attention he or she got from the early wins, and they don't know much else about the candidate pool.

2. Provide an example.

Tell students you're now going to give them an example. (Make clear where you are at all times in the sequence.) Take the Iowa caucuses, which long were the first nominating event in the sequence (until 2024). These caucuses had been followed fairly quickly by the New Hampshire primary. Show polling from New Hampshire both before and soon after the Iowa caucuses. Consider Pete Buttigieg, who ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020. Though he started the race with low name recognition, he and his campaign canvassed extensively in Iowa, and he took a narrow lead in the Iowa precinct caucuses. Polls among New Hampshire Democrats showed that before the Iowa caucuses took place, only 11 percent expressed support for Buttigieg. Right afterward, his support in New Hampshire jumped to 19 percent.

As President Buttigieg can attest, the Iowa caucuses don't necessarily make or break candidates. It's hard to prove definitively; we can't tell what would have happened if the voting in Iowa hadn't occurred. Yet the movement in the New Hampshire polling is consistent with the idea of momentum.

You might then provide a counter-example, to show that this is a tendency, but it doesn't always hold. Factors other than the early nominating events affect later states' voters as well. But Buttigieg is one example of a candidate who benefited from momentum, at least for a while.

Note that using memorable examples can help students recall the original concept even after the course is over. That increases the value of your teaching for the student and the community. So use examples that are more likely to hold students' attention and to be retained in memory. Buttigieg, the first openly LGBTQ presidential candidate, is likely to be one of those.

3. Connect the example to the organizing idea.

Why should you have to do this? Isn't it obvious? Most of us find that students are more likely to retain concrete information than abstract ideas. Your aim in offering the example is to help make the abstract idea more memorable.

The problem is that for that very reason, students may be more inclined to recall the example than the concept. You want that example to trigger their recall of the concept, even after the semester ends. When a candidate wins the first primary of the next presidential campaign, you want students to recall the connection: "Oh, yeah; this could produce momentum for that candidate, which wouldn't be happening if the U.S. had a one-shot national primary." At least we can hope.

4. State a consequence of the organizing idea.

Go on to answer the "who cares?" question that's likely to come next. Mention at least one implication of the concept. You could say, for instance: It's especially important for a candidate to do well in the earliest nomination events because that will boost the candidate's chances in later primaries and caucuses. Yet when Iowa and New Hampshire were the first nominating events, their populations weren't very typical of the U.S. population as a whole. So some types of presidential candidates will probably do better than others simply because the nominating process is sequential, and some states, with particular characteristics, get to go first. The rules affect the outcome.

Suppose a student raises a hand at this point and suggests a contradictory piece of information: e.g., "But Hillary Clinton won New Hampshire over Barack Obama in 2008, yet she didn't win the nomination as a whole!" Don't take it as a personal challenge, but rather, as a chance to reinforce the point. You can respond: "Good! You clearly understand the concept, and you've noted that momentum doesn't produce a winner 100 percent of the time." You could explain that momentum can be short-lived; other world or national events or candidate actions can intervene, and some nominating events get more attention, and so can produce more momentum, than others. But momentum can make a difference in the short term, which candidates can use to improve their prospects of winning the nomination.

Then take them right back to the point. The point is that generally, in the case of momentum, events build; early primaries affect later results. (It's perfectly OK to state it slightly differently each time, to increase the awareness of some students who connect better with one of these phrasings than another.)

Finally, briefly restate the whole series: Momentum is… We can see an example of momentum in the role of the Iowa caucuses in the presidential selection process, which have often seemed to change the results of the New Hampshire primary and can affect which candidate eventually becomes the party's nominee. Because of momentum, early nominating events make a bigger difference in the outcome, most of the time, than later events do. As a

result, which states get to hold the first nominating events becomes a matter of great importance to candidates and party leaders. Iowa's and New Hampshire's lead-off role was long a matter of controversy, especially within the Democratic Party.

If you choose and have enough time, you could take the implications of the concept further. How could the parties change their nominating processes to produce candidates who better reflect their party's voters nationwide? What types of changes would students suggest? How might such changes alter the types of candidates who win the party's nomination? Could they affect the types of issues discussed in the campaigns? Or you simply transition to the next big idea.

This is a very general framework. You can take it in any direction you choose. But it's an easy way to remind yourself what to do: state the organizing idea. Give an example. Tie the example to the organizing idea. State a consequence (or several) of the organizing idea. Summarize and move on.

How should your lecture relate to the readings? You aren't there to repeat the readings. You are there to **complement** the readings. Provide new examples of the ideas stated in the readings. Show how one idea in the readings relates to another. Emphasize the most important points, so that students don't get lost in the details. Ask how key points in the readings relate to events that have happened recently in American politics. If you've assigned readings that provide a point of view, ask students to respond to that viewpoint.

It's often helpful to use the phrase occasionally, "As you've learned from the readings…." Remind them that they do need to complete the readings, which are obviously more elaborate and detailed than you have time to be in lecture.

"But Why Do We Have to Talk About History if This Is a Poli Sci Class?"

This is the functional equivalent of, "But why should you take the coherence of my writing into account if this isn't an English class?" Students come to us from high schools in which the move from Government class to English class is underscored by physically leaving one classroom and entering another. They derive the conclusion that Government means Government and English means English, and never the twain shall meet.

I had a student who objected to discussing the New Deal with what he considered the definitive evidence that teaching history is irrelevant: "But that happened before I was born!" Those of us with a somewhat longer perspective need to show our students that the history of the events and rules we're discussing provides context that helps us understand them better.

One way to do that is to **draw relevant history into the students' contemporary lives. By putting them in the shoes of the historical decision-makers**, we can often make the events

we're discussing speak to them about the very real, human choices and circumstances that have led to today's politics and government.

Consider the increasing reach of government involvement in people's daily lives, with roots in the New Deal and the 1960s and 1970s. The writers of the Constitution probably wouldn't have dreamed of mentioning abortion in that document. Abortion was not an uncommon practice at that time, partly because few reliable contraceptive methods existed. But the federal government in our early years was much smaller and more constrained.

Over the next couple of centuries, changes in people's circumstances led some to organize into groups, as the First Amendment allowed, to reflect their beliefs on changing reproductive practices. In the late 1800s, in response to group pressures, most state legislatures moved to prohibit abortions except in limited cases (Luker 1984).

Once many more women entered the workforce in the 1960s, pro-choice groups succeeded in pressing some state legislatures to relax those prohibitions. The Supreme Court codified that view in 1973 with Roe *v.* Wade, contending that abortion was one of the privacy rights conferred in the Constitution. But as Schattschneider would lead us to expect, that decision shocked a number of groups into action with a very different definition of the issue. These groups gained increasing success in state legislatures recently, culminating in 2022 when the Court reversed itself and overturned Roe.

These policy changes didn't just happen. They resulted from individual legislators and judges, not so very different from the individuals in your class, responding to the press of different interests wielding different resources under conditions that favored or hampered their activity. At key points during this time, these political actors had been pressed by organized groups to accept the group's definition of abortion as the correct one and to enshrine it in law.

Students can imagine how they might have responded to these pressures and on what basis they might have made their decision and explained it to people who disagreed with it. By inviting students to put themselves in the place of these decision-makers, both long ago and in the present, we can help students see how the push and pull of interests over time, coinciding with candidates' and parties' efforts to win elections, leads to policy change – and how the result is that government action can affect even some of the most personal choices they make.

4/ Delivering a Lecture

The First Day of Class

The more First Days you've had, the easier they will get. Remember to **try out your classroom before the first day of class.** See what the view looks like from the back row. Test every device you plan to use, to make sure you know how they work, even the lights and window blinds. Make sure you can hook up your laptop! You don't want technological glitches on the first day.

You have three things to accomplish today: **engage students in the course, introduce the person who will guide them through it** – i.e., you (and the TA, if there is one), **and acquaint them with the syllabus.** Tell students why they've made a smart choice in selecting your course. Tell them how important and interesting the subject matter is. Give them some examples. Explain how they will gain skills that are important to their futures.

Tell them about you: the relevant stuff (your background, your training) and the less-relevant but interesting stuff. Put the syllabus on the screen. Let them know that their own participation is a key element in their learning; the more they put into the class, the more they will get out of it.

Make it clear that you feel a sense of mission in guiding them through the material, because the material and the students deserve it. If you give the impression that you don't really care about the class – that you are punching your ticket – why should they? Students who see that you enjoy teaching and want to help them do well are likely to react positively to you. Enthusiasm is contagious. Remind them that you and they have the same goal: to help them succeed. You measure your own success, at least in part, by how well your students are doing.

Use this first day to **learn about your students as well**, to see gauge what types of examples interest them the most and what level of knowledge various class members already have (see Bok 2022). You can do so with a written questionnaire or ask students to raise their hands as you list alternatives or call out their answers. Where are they from geographically? What is their first memory of politics? Pose a problem for them to solve: What limits younger people's voter turnout? Is that a serious problem for US democracy, and if so, why?

Asking students to raise their hands or respond orally helps establish the pattern that they're expected to participate. Written questionnaires let you refer to the information later when students visit your office hours. If you ask them to write their answers, don't ask for touchy information such as their party ID.

A Teacher Walked into a Classroom…

… and sensibly arrived with enough time to get the technology set up without being frazzled when starting to lecture. When you enter your classroom, look around at your students. If any are

looking up from their phones, greet them with a smile. If you've allotted a few minutes of extra time before the class starts, then if a student asks you a question, you can answer it and still get your slides set up or your outline on the board. You don't have to be overly personal; it isn't necessary to chat about last weekend's basketball game with people in the front row. You are there to offer them your insights, not your friendship.

Before you begin to lecture, keep in mind that your students have just come from a wide variety of differing experiences, from sleeping to working out to surfing the Internet to conjugating Spanish, and you'll need to bring their attention back to politics and your class. One impactful way is to **start with a brief mention of some current event that demonstrates a concept you've previously discussed** in class or which you plan to discuss later. If there's been a mass shooting, you can remind students of your previous discussion about how various interest groups try to get their definition of an event accepted as the "real" definition (e.g., gun control groups have referred to the threat to public safety of easily available guns when commenting on the shooting, whereas gun rights groups have blamed mental health issues or "bad people").

Then, you'll want to move them further into the topic of the day as you begin the lecture. Discussing a current event can be very engaging for students; you'll need to limit the time you allot for it, so that this appetizer doesn't inadvertently become the main course.

Presenting the Lecture

Start the day's material with some kind of introduction, just as you do when writing a paper for a class or a journal. In a professional paper (or a paper for a grad course), you'd start with how your research in that paper fits into some larger body of knowledge (the literature in the field) and why the reader should care about what you're presenting.

In lecturing, make clear how the material in today's lecture relates to the overall aims of the course. Remind students what you discussed in the previous lecture and **where today's topics fit in the overall logic of the course.** For instance, we're now discussing the nature of presidential elections, so today we'll talk about how they start. State why **the student** should care. Why is the subject matter important (e.g.: the types of presidential candidates we select can make a big difference in your life and your employment chances)?

You'll get a two-fer if this statement of the lecture's importance includes something **dramatic or immediate**. You could, for instance, mention a major event in the most recent nominating season that told us something important about a candidate or a political party. (It's not necessary for you to provide your personal opinion of that event; see "A Note about Partisan or Ideological Bias" below.)

Conclude the introduction by listing some **questions you want the students to be able to answer before they leave class today.** E.g., before you leave class today, I want you to know (and be able to explain, if I were to ask you) how public involvement in the nomination process

has changed over time, how nominations are dynamic processes and why that matters, what momentum is, and why it's important. That helps focus their minds on a concrete task.

Always use an outline. It's possible to use any of several different styles. You could write the outline on the board. You could put it on PowerPoint slides. You could post the slides online and let students access it during class. You could post them in advance for students to download and use as a basis for taking notes.

It's helpful if your outline is comprehensible as it stands, rather than being just a few cryptic words or phrases. Many students write only what they see written on the board or the slide. If it's a two-word phrase that doesn't explain itself, students will have a tougher time figuring out what that phrase meant when they review their notes for an exam. If you're providing an example, label it as an example.

Alternatively, create slides that are purposefully incomplete. One might be: We define "party identification" as… Then, after you've provided that definition, wait a few minutes to let students write down the answer. When you see most faces looking up at you, they're ready to go on. When students hand-write something, they remember it better (Lincoln 2020).

Speak in a conversational tone. Keep looking at your students, rather than at your notes or a point above their heads. Making eye contact assures them you care that they are learning.

Perhaps the most important feeling you can convey during a lecture is your own **enthusiasm** for it. You think these points are important, right? If students see that, they are more likely to share your excitement. Demonstrate that these big ideas matter to you, and you think everyone else ought to feel the same about what you're telling them! Be expressive, just as you would if you were trying to excite a child about a topic. Be fully present in your own lecture.

Don't just stand there. Move around, especially if you use PowerPoint. Stop your lecturing after you've made a point and look around. Ask if students are with you. Raise a question for them to answer. Ask them to write about the point for a minute.

As always with PowerPoint, don't assault them. No more than 15 or 20 slides per class meeting, none of them crammed with words in small type. It's best if you can reveal one point at a time in each slide, so that students are not copying frantically a set of material different from the one you're discussing at that point. Don't read from your slide; that means your back will face the students.

Include a video clip to illustrate your point. You can find lots of interesting and short video clips (up to 5-10 minutes) to exemplify the idea you're discussing. Use video from news programs, documentaries, or campaign ads. If you're discussing negative ads, show one or two.

Remember, however, that many students' eyes glaze over when they see colors on a screen. You don't want them to put down their note-taking devices when they see those colors. Set the scene by telling them what to look for in the clip(s). Show the clip(s). Then ask them what they saw or tell them what they saw. That makes the video more instructive. In particular, don't turn off the lights in the room when you use slides or a video clip. Some students will fall asleep. Others will have trouble seeing their notebooks or devices in order to take notes. You can dim the lights sufficiently to meet both needs.

Modulate your tone. People's attention drifts when you speak in a monotone. When you're reaching an important point, say it louder – or softer and make them strain to hear it. Don't be deterred by the old criticism that effective teachers are "just performers." If we can't keep our students' attention, then exactly how much teaching are we doing?

Watch your tone. Sometimes, a student will ask a dumb question. That's OK; if they knew everything, there'd be no need for teachers. Some college students come from public schools that gave them inadequate preparation for advanced study. Others may be budding engineers or math majors who never paid much attention to social science.

Always treat any question or comment with respect. If necessary, you can rephrase it without embarrassing the questioner: "So if I can summarize, you're asking…?" We demonstrate our extensive learning by explaining things well, not by talking over students' heads or by seeming to condescend. One of the best ways to get poor student evaluations is to be perceived as casting pearls before swine. The swine tend not to be impressed.

Always leave time for a conclusion. If you find yourself with too little time left to complete everything in your notes, it's better to drop your last point than to drop your conclusion. You can always tell them the last point on Canvas later, through an announcement. But the time taken in concluding is vital, to tell them how your points fit together.

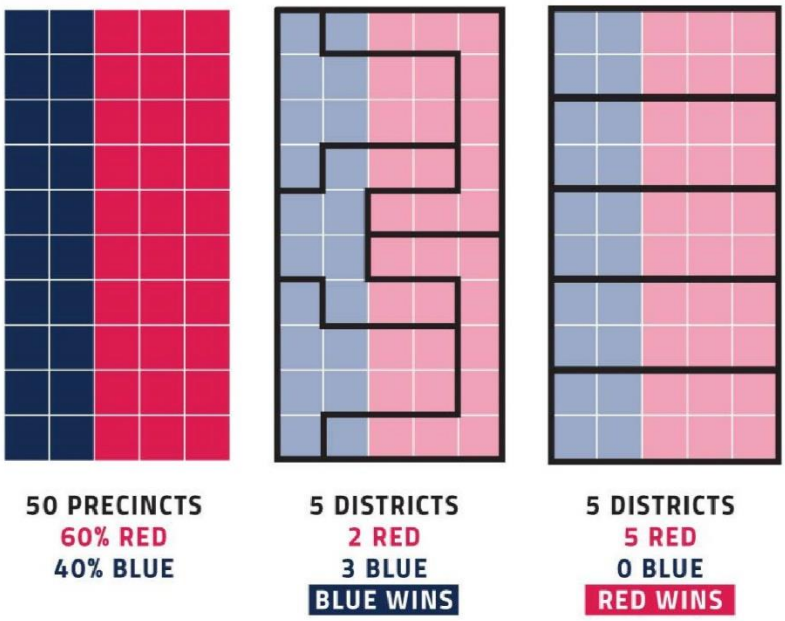
The simplest form for your conclusion is to remind them of the questions you said you wanted them to be able to answer by the end of class. Ask for their answers. Or summarize the answers. For more helpful information on lecturing, read Bok (1992) and Kuther (undated).

Using Active Learning and Discussion in a Large Lecture Course

… is not just possible but helpful in engaging students. We all understand the difference between memorizing something and understanding it. Take the concepts of redistricting and gerrymandering, for instance. You can define the terms, explain why and how they happen in electoral politics, and point out the challenges gerrymandering can pose for democratic representation.

But think how much more fully students will understand once they go through this short in-class exercise showing them how a hypothetical city's voting districts (in this case, precincts)

could be redistricted by a partisan committee intent on favoring either one party or the other, without having violated the standard requirement of creating districts of equal size:



Source: [What Is Gerrymandering - Bing images]

Another effective tool for getting students' attention and engagement is to **put them into the shoes of the decision-makers** you're talking about. For most students, the idea of legislative gerrymandering or redistricting is pretty remote; they know it exists, but they probably aren't thinking that it affects their own lives. So bring them into the picture. Say, "Imagine that you are a state legislator who's a major figure in your legislative party. Census results have been released, and the legislature needs to redraw the district lines to keep the districts equal in population. What would your aims be? What information would you look for? What if a journalist came up to you and said, 'Is this really a fair redistricting, or does it tilt the playing field toward your own party's candidates?' How would you defend your gerrymandering?"

Better yet, give students a hard-copy handout of just the image farthest to the left (above) and ask *them* to create five legislative districts that fairly reflect the partisanship of the area and then to create five districts that distort it. That will provide them with not just a definition but also a deeper feel for the ease with which a one-party-dominated legislature can perpetuate its domination.

Holding a discussion in a large (150+ students) lecture hall is harder but not at all impossible. The main obstacle is in getting students to feel brave enough to raise their hands. Give them some practice by first asking for a show of hands on some aspect of the subject you're lecturing about and then asking students to explain why they felt that way. It may take a little patience to wait until someone responds, but surely out of 150 individuals, there will be one

courageous enough to offer a comment. Then you can ask for a response from someone with a different view.

Especially if you teach a class that's longer than 50 minutes, **change your mode of presentation every 20 or 30 minutes**. If you've been lecturing, stop to ask a question. If you've been holding a discussion, have students write their answer to a question for a few minutes. It's often a good idea to ask a series of questions that require students to raise their hands; you'll want to make sure that their brains don't shut down during a long class period. Simple movement can help them reinvigorate their minds. So can a mid-class break.

Pacing Your Lecture

Every new instructor – and a whole lot of more experienced lecturers – find that they either run out of lecture material before the class period ends or that they run out of class period before their lecture material ends. Over time, we can better estimate how to pace a lecture so that it fits the available time.

Till that blessed day occurs, here are some ways to deal with this issue. One advantage of writing out your lecture notes in full and having them in hard copy is that the pages will be numbered, so you can check the clock periodically and see if, for instance, you've reached the halfway mark in your notes when the class is halfway over.

Without that advantage, be prepared to make some rough calculations as you proceed through your outline. If you have four main ideas to present in your lecture and the first one took half the class period, you'll know it's time to speed up. It's possible, of course, just to postpone the latter main idea(s) until the next lecture. But the piper will need to be paid. If today's lecture takes up half of the next day's class, then in some future lecture you'll be able to present only half the ideas you had planned for, or you'll have to cut some ideas short. You don't want that to happen right before the midterm, when that last idea is already included on an exam question you wrote earlier.

If you're running out of time, reduce the length of your examples. Or tell your students that you'll write out your presentation of your last point or two and send it to them on your campus's e-learning system. Don't drop the conclusion of your lecture; it's very important to remind students of the primary points you've made that day before they leave.

What if you finish too early? That's easier. Take the last main point you made and begin a discussion of it. Raise a different example of that point and ask students to show how it demonstrates the concept. Ask the students for yet another example and go through the same process. Think of a piece of current news (it helps if you have already thought about one) that shows how the concept works.

You can always end class early. Your students will not mind. But you will have lost some of the very limited time that we have to engage our undergraduates in political questions and to encourage them to assess the political institutions that will affect their lives.

Helping Students with Note-Taking

Especially in introductory college courses, students newly arrived from secondary schools may have some difficulty figuring out what to write down – i.e., how to take notes. It's not uncommon that high school social studies teachers explicitly tell students what they need to write down in their notebooks. Without that guidance, some students might feel lost. So consider talking with the class early in the semester, even as a refresher in some advanced courses, about what to write down in their notes on lectures and readings. (Yes, that seems incredibly basic. Remember, our own experience is not typical of that of a first-year student in a college class.)

You'll want to remind them that their aim is to write down what they'll need to recall for the next test(s), because their memory is not likely to be sufficient after a time lapse. Thus **they should have in their notes a clear description of the main ideas presented in each lecture and an example of each**, to improve their recall. If they don't understand a point when they first write it down, it's not likely to have clarified itself by the time they read their notes later.

Taking notes effectively requires students to **distinguish between the major points and the less-significant detail.** If they're trying to write down everything you say, they're failing to make that distinction. They should be able to use the outline you provide in the lecture as an indicator of what's most important, just as they use subheads, topic paragraphs, and topic sentences to tell them what's most important in the readings. If that's a challenge for any student, invite them to talk with you in office hours, in which you can compare the notes the student actually took on the day's lecture with what you hope they would have derived from the day's class. Or put your notes from one lecture online, so that students can compare them with what they themselves regarded as important while note-taking.

Lecturing Online

Teaching online isn't a completely different beast from teaching in person, but it does require adaptation. Our experience with online classes is relatively recent, but we do have some notions about best practices. And we know that just as the old notion of the Sage on the Stage doesn't always produce fascinating results, the Talking Head on the Screen doesn't necessarily hold students' attention either.

First, don't worry much about choosing the perfect background scenery; after the first minute, nobody will notice (until you lean out of the space allotted for the talking head). Find a quiet physical space where you're comfortable. Don't have a bright light shining in the background. Do have some light in front of you (a window, a live computer screen). Position

your head toward the middle of the screen. It helps if you can adjust your camera so that it shows you looking forward at the student rather than to the side.

You don't need to place a bookshelf behind you filled with scholarly-looking tomes. If there IS a bookshelf behind you, check out the titles that are within view to pull out any that might be too "interesting." Remove the cocktail glass, any political posters, and ensure that dogs, cats, children, and other people are safely unseen and unheard for the duration of the class. If something unexpected happens, resolve it as best you can and move on. (If you want to introduce your dog or your toddler, do so, but it should be a cameo appearance.)

Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Teaching

Online teaching can be done with students present (though online) while you're teaching – called **"synchronous" teaching** – and in recorded form so students can access your teaching at a time of their own choosing – **asynchronous teaching**. You probably won't have a choice as to which method you use; that's a decision typically made by deans and deanlets. These methods can be very different in approach.

Synchronous teaching is more like an in-person class. You can usually see the screens with students' faces, which helps alert you to times when they are tuning out. They can ask questions in the chat function or by raising their hand icon, so you can respond in real time to the issues they raise. Because this form of online teaching comes closest to a live classroom, it has the advantage of greater familiarity for the instructor, who can gauge students' learning and answer their questions as they arise. Many students feel more engaged in a class when they can participate in real time, and the class becomes more of a habit because it's regularly scheduled.

Teaching **asynchronously** means that you and various students will be engaging with the class's content at different times. The great advantage here is that students can access the class on their own schedule; they won't have to miss class because of an appointment (though note that if you record a synchronous class for students to access, they can also catch up with classes they missed.) The great disadvantage is also that students can access the class on their own schedule, which means that they may be more likely not to access it at all, or all at once on the night before the exam. Asynchronous classes, then, require more incentive on the student's part, which not all our students possess (see University of Waterloo, undated).

Many schools prefer asynchronous classes because of their greater accessibility and their ease for students who need captioning or whose first language is not English. If you follow that preference, though, you'll need to find ways to engage students even if you can't tell when or whether they may have become disengaged. You may also want to encourage students to use whatever function your platform has to relay students' questions so that you can create connections with them individually. That increases the chance that they'll learn more.

Keep in mind that you can use both methods in a single course. By posting some videos for students to view asynchronously, you can provide more detailed ideas or deal with a topic you don't have time to include in your in-real-time teaching.

Many of us use Zoom for our synchronous lectures. Your college or university may have another preference or delivery device for asynchronous teaching. If your department or school has a computer tech person, see if he or she can help you **do a practice session** and be available in case of emergency. Test your Zoom and Internet connection in advance; it's a huge waste of time to struggle with your connection once class has begun. If you don't have a fast, reliable Internet connection, go someplace that does.

I find it helpful to Zoom on my phone while it's propped in front of, and toward the bottom of, my PC screen. That way, I can scroll through my class notes unobtrusively on the PC while looking in the same direction as the camera on my phone. Make sure the microphone and camera in your device are up to the task. Be seated; don't try to video yourself giving a lecture as you would in a classroom.

Just as you use PowerPoint or other devices to project an outline in an in-person lecture, so you can **use screen sharing to put that outline in front of your students,** whether you teach in real time or asynchronously. In addition to moving between you and the outline, you can also include video clips that exemplify the ideas or concepts you present in your lecture. Be sure in advance that you know how to move quickly from your own face on the screen to the screen-shared outline and back again; tech delays are the best possible ways to (1) interrupt an effective lecture and (2) convince your students that you are obsolete.

In synchronous teaching, it often helps if you put the students on "mute" and unmute only yourself or the speaker at the time. Otherwise, distractions will take their toll; an unmuted student is listening to music in the background, somebody sneezes, the dog objects strenuously to have been locked in another room.

Then talk. Don't apologize for not being in person; our students are quite familiar with screens. There's no need to call attention to the mediated nature of the class at all, other than to let students know the rules: that in synchronous classes they can raise their hands by clicking on the "hand" icon, that they can ask questions by clicking on "chat," and that it might be best if they reserve their questions or comments till you ask for them; chat questions will appear on your screen whenever they're input, which can be distracting for the lecturer. In asynchronous classes, let them know how to ask their questions and record their comments.

If you request comments and suggestions during a synchronous lecture, it's ideal to have someone else write them down for you as they come in. That way, you won't miss a question that appears while you're answering another one. (You can also click on the chat function and re-read earlier questions, but that requires at least some down-time.) If you don't have that luxury, then just remind students that if you haven't responded to their question, they should pose it

again. And if your students are accessing your class on their own schedule, be sure to have a means by which they can give you feedback on how they're doing and can ask you whatever questions they have about the material or the course.

In any case, **you'll need to have a routine for troubleshooting problems with connectivity and other glitches.** They generally do happen, and it's frustrating for both you and the students to wait while they get figured out.

Guest Speakers

Good guest speakers can provide students with some variety in the class. Students also often appreciate hearing from someone who's more directly engaged in the topic than you may be. For instance, if you're teaching about U.S. political parties and you want to discuss minor parties, you could talk at them about the challenges faced by these parties, describe their variety in issues and organization, and consider whether U.S. politics works differently than it would if it were a multi-party system, or if there were no minor parties.

But how much more interesting could it be if your students heard directly from, for instance, a local Libertarian Party candidate? The challenges faced by minor parties become much clearer and more compelling when students hear from someone who's faced those challenges.

What's the downside? As is the case with any guest speaker, simply being in an interesting position doesn't necessarily make someone an interesting speaker. **Attend a talk by a prospective guest speaker before inviting him or her to your class. Make very clear what types of information you'd like the speaker to present.** For instance, if you want a current congressional candidate to discuss campaign finance, make clear that the candidate is not there to deliver a campaign speech.

Handing Back Exams and Papers

The atmosphere in a class changes – dramatically – when you announce that you're giving back students' midterms or papers. Give back exams or papers at the end of a class period. Otherwise, some students will spend lecture time paging through their papers and searching for comments.

This is not a good time for an extensive discussion of all the correct answers. Some students may be inclined toward arguing rather than learning; others simply don't care what the right answers were, now that they've gotten their grade.

Instead, **phrase your discussion of the exams or papers in a forward-looking way**: Here's what students can learn from their performance on this exam that will help them do better

on the next one. But don't expect to cause a sea change in their studying or writing; the anxiety that accompanies the return of graded papers can prevent much learning from taking place.

As a matter of procedure, I find it easiest to alphabetize the exams or papers and then call out two or three names at a time, to speed up the return process, rather than to have to wait till a student lumbers down from the back row before handing out the next exam.

When you hand back papers, encourage students to talk with you during office hours about their exam – but ask them to wait a day before doing so. We are seldom at our most persuasive when we've just received a lower-than-expected grade. Don't worry that you'll have dozens of students asking to speak with you; most won't, but by inviting them, you'll have demonstrated that you care about their learning.

You don't need to threaten that if they appeal a grade, you may subtract as well as add points. Few students will take the time to go over their exam with you as it is, and these few can learn a lot from discussing their work. Let them know that you've kept copies of the best essays on the exam, or the best papers, and you'll be glad to compare these examples with the student's, to see how they can do better next time.

When students do come to ask about their grade, **ask them to read their answer aloud to you**. (This can help alert students to times when they thought they included a point but didn't, or when they assumed information that should have been provided explicitly.) **Then read them the exemplar answer.** Talk with them about the differences between the two answers, so they can see clearly what you're looking for. Use the opportunity to identify what are the main elements the student can add or change to improve her performance on the next exam or paper.

Assessing Your Lecture

Always take a moment right after you teach a class to **make a few notes about the specifics of how it went.** What points do you think you made effectively? Were there things you noticed that could have been explained more clearly? Need a better example? Make sure you write it down.

There's no need to rewrite your lecture at that point. Just write your thoughts down while you still remember them. That lets you learn from each lecture experience.

We all have bad days; there's always the next lecture. Once you've thought about what could have gone better and, if possible, what changes you'd like to make the next time you teach that topic, move on.

5/ How to Lead a Productive Discussion

We've considered what lectures are for. What are in-class discussions for? They aren't just a means of getting students to talk. Teenagers are already very skilled at talking, and the things they most like to talk about aren't suitable for a class in political science.

So let's look at discussions in a different light. What can discussions add to a class beyond what students can get from a lecture? What do we want to accomplish when we hold a discussion? I'll refer here to discussion sections in a large course **and** leading discussions during any lecture.

Discussions give students a chance to deepen their understanding of an idea presented in lecture by practicing it. They can raise questions they might be embarrassed to ask during lecture. Discussions are an opportunity for students to become more actively involved in their learning and to practice the difference between an opinion ("I personally believe…") and an argument ("Here's evidence to support this point of view….").

In lecture you will have presented several main ideas of the course and offered an example to show how each concept works in practice. **Discussions are a good time to have students apply the concept to a different example,** which can give them a fuller view of how the concept works.

Here's an instance. You're teaching Introduction to American Politics, and you've just been lecturing on organized interests/interest groups. You've presented the basics of the topic: a definition, some examples, interest group behavior in recent politics, and reasons why the activities of interest groups have an important impact on U.S. democracy. You may have lectured on some possible reforms of the interest group system.

But all this is still a bit remote for many of your students. Moving to a discussion, or in a discussion section, you can bring the concept home to them. You've defined organized interests as groups or institutions that organize to try to get their definition of an issue(s) accepted and enforced in public policy. In discussion, move to an (or another) example.

Every issue can be defined in more than one way. Many people believe that owning a firearm is important for self-protection. Others feel that owning a gun can risk the safety of children in a home. Some contend that gun ownership is the main guarantee of individual rights against a powerful government. Many feel that widespread gun sales are a threat to public safety. Others respond that widespread gun ownership preserves public safety. Every issue can be defined in more than one way, sometimes even by the same person!

Take that concept – that there are many different ways of defining a given issue, and different groups can arise to promote each definition – and apply it to immigration. Start with some discussion of the basics, such as the number of people, documented and undocumented,

who enter the U.S. every year, where they're from, the laws that govern immigration, where these immigrants tend to live in the U.S., and their impact on the workforce, the economy, and anything else that interests you, so that students have some basis for responding.

Then ask your students: If many immigrants find employment in resort hotels or large farms, how might the owners of such enterprises view an increase in immigration? How might a social conservative in a small Midwestern town view it? How might a group of community leaders from a city on the U.S./Mexican border feel? What about groups concerned about the equitable treatment of Latino Americans? How about a local school system where many immigrant children live?

Many of these groups feel very strongly about immigration, and they have the First Amendment right to petition Congress and other agencies to express their views. But they don't want to just talk. They want to persuade decision-makers – in city councils, state legislatures, Congress, and other places of power – to agree that their definition of the immigration issue is the correct one. To do that, each group uses one or more of a set of standard methods – press conferences, talking to reporters, lobbying members of Congress, making campaign contributions, running broadcast and narrowcast ads, sending mailings to influence public opinion, recruiting experts – to get its definition accepted and enforced.

By using this issue, you've given a "face" to organized interests. **Now ask students to apply this concept to another example.** Choose an issue you'd expect them to be interested in. Or ask them to raise an issue that concerns them. Then lead them through the process of identifying groups that might have an interest, what the group's arguments might be, and what methods of persuasion and resources each group might have at its disposal.

How about student loans? Students who need funding for college are likely to consider student loans a good idea, as long as the interest rates are reasonable and the rules about repaying the loans are favorable. What other types of people, groups, or institutions are likely to be involved in any congressional discussion on providing student loans? Banks? Low- and high-income parents? Fiscal conservatives? Prospective employers of the recipients of these loans? What are each of these groups likely to want to see happen with regard to student loans? What types of interest group methods are they likely to use to get their definitions of the issue accepted and enforced?

Then return to the main concept, so that students can see how guns, immigration, and student loans are all issues likely to prompt action by organized interests in politics. Ask them to consider the consequences of this interest group activity for the successful functioning of a democracy. Point out that conflicting views on a given topic are inevitable in a democracy, which gives contending groups an opportunity – though not equal opportunity – to express them through speech, press, and assembly.

Discussions are also a time when students can ask questions about the concept. **Never *start* a discussion by asking, "Do you have any questions?"** Students learn early that if they all remain silent, there's at least a chance that you'll let them out of class early. Instead, encourage them to raise questions **after** they've gone through the process of applying the concept to an example; this specific exercise will help them identify what may confuse them about it.

It's tempting to approach a discussion without a plan. Don't. Opening a discussion without preparation makes it more likely for the discussion to go off track. **Before you start a discussion section, or start a discussion in lecture, always have your goal in mind.** What particular conclusions do you want them to reach in today's discussion?

Here's a Plan for Holding a Discussion Section as Part of a Lecture Course

Some hours or days will elapse between your lecture and the discussion section. That means your lecture won't necessarily be fresh in students' minds when they arrive in section. To have a productive discussion, you need to bring them back to the mindset you created during the lecture.

Begin, for example, by **introducing the subject again, and then stating your goal for the discussion.** Remind students why the subject is important. If nothing else, explain that students will do much better on the next exam if they develop a fuller understanding of the concept. Then ask them to apply the concept to a different example.

- Always **prepare a list of the points you want to make sure are raised**. Do that before the discussion section begins.
- Place that list of points in front of you during the discussion and keep glancing at it. When the discussion flags, introduce one of the points that students haven't raised yet, or at least offer a clue – e.g., "If you were a small farmer, competing with big corporate farms that employ immigrants, how might you feel about increasing immigration?"
- Lead students to bring up the points you want them to raise. You can do that by **asking focused, leading questions, not broad, general ones.** If you're discussing interest group action on gun control, for instance, you could ask students to imagine they are police officers learning about a legislative proposal to allow concealed carry. How would officers react to the proposal? What could they do about it? Would they be more successful by using group action or by acting as individuals?
- If a student makes a point that comes anywhere near one of the points on your list, **use the student's comment to bring out the point you want made.** Or use a transition: "Sarah says that …. That brings up an interesting point about the effects of electoral rules on representation."
- After you've raised a question, **wait longer than a comfortable interval** before you rephrase it or move on. The few seconds after you ask a question will seem like hours to

you. They aren't. Students need time to phrase their ideas so that they feel comfortable voicing them. If the uncomfortable interval expires, rephrase the question. Make it more specific and concrete. (I often tell students after I've rephrased the question twice that I will now stand and stare at them till someone answers. It always works.)

Always **have your conclusion to the discussion ready in advance** and leave time for it. In your conclusion, restate the importance of the topic and the main points brought up by the discussion. For example: We talked today about the concept of interest groups trying to get their definition of an issue accepted, … That matters in American politics because different interests will see an issue differently, which generates political debate and, often, conflict. Conflict doesn't have to be a bad thing, and it is inevitable in a large and diverse society. To get their definition enforced, interest groups can use these methods…

Leaving time for your conclusion means that you need to be monitoring the clock, at least surreptitiously, so that you can stop with five or so minutes to go and start your conclusion.

If you still have a minute before class ends, you could ask students to look for news stories prior to the next class meeting about an issue that interests them and see if they can identify the differing definitions being offered for that issue and who's offering them.

You could also reinforce the conclusion by asking them to write a **minute paper** in which each student writes a couple of sentences about what was the most important point they derived from the discussion, or what confused them about the topic. That's a useful form of assessment for you. Reading through the papers quickly can give you a sense of whether most students picked up the main idea and whether any misinterpretations occurred more than once.

In your next class, **report what they said in their minute papers.** That gives you the chance to reiterate an important point as well as to let them know you care what they have to say. "Most of you got the main point that…" A few of you seemed to be assuming…. The reason that's not helpful is …

In fact, you can teach a class entirely through discussion, by following this format. Some instructors are more comfortable doing this than others are. You'll need to prepare thoroughly, to monitor where the discussion is going as well as where it is now. That isn't easy.

Other Specific Recommendations for an Effective Discussion

- Put the title of the discussion on the board or on the computer. That gives it importance and reminds students of the purpose of that class day.
- When a student responds, **repeat** the main point the student made, both to ensure that others have heard it and to connect the point clearly to the discussion.

- **Write important points** on the board or on the computer. Otherwise, students will consider them unimportant.
- It's harder to know how to pace yourself in a discussion than in a lecture, because you have greater control over the lecture. Try numbering the points you want to see made in the discussion and check the clock on your computer periodically to make sure you have time for the rest.
- Be sure to answer the "who cares" question: **why does it matter** that interest groups try to get their definition of an issue accepted and enforced?

How Do You Get Students to Talk (Productively)?

Just as with lectures, students will walk through the door of your discussion sections after coming from all kinds of non-political-science experiences. A few have just awakened. You, in contrast, have probably been deeply involved in the course material for the past hour or more. In short, the class starts at a point where you are not on common ground with your students. **Your first task is to re-set them**: get them engaged in the topic of your course.

As in lecture, you might begin by mentioning something that's been in the news recently that relates to your class. Perhaps there's been a recent event that can help you illustrate a concept you're trying to get across. Make it engaging; students love to sound well-informed, so they'll listen better if you start with something they can tell their friends.

You might begin with a class poll: How many of you have heard of ….? Or, if you're teaching about foreign policy, and Russia has just invaded Ukraine, ask who's been following the issue and can provide some information.

Many students see politics and government as alien places, irrelevant to their lives. Challenge that perception by asking them to consider ways in which, for instance, the Russian invasion of Ukraine could affect them personally.

Another option is to begin by polling the class on the topic you plan to discuss. Students love to give their own opinions. Remember that after having asked a question, you need to wait past your usual point of embarrassment for their answers, or else you'll be tempted to jump in with the answer instead of giving students time to rehearse their response in their minds.

Here are some other suggestions for perking up a listless class:

- **Keep your list of the points you want to elicit** from the discussion in front of you and check them off as they're offered.
- Instead of asking, "Any questions?" say, "I'm sure you have some questions now, or some things you'd like to clarify. So who'd like to go first?"

- A student responds to your question with something that's off the point. You could say, "Thanks, but let's get back to the discussion of …" If you're good at improvising, you could use some segue to connect the student's comment with the point. When in dire need, I simply make the next point I had planned to discuss and then say to the student, "That's what you meant, isn't it?" Students are generally happy to agree that that's exactly what they meant.
- **When one student** keeps raising their hand and **dominates the discussion**, other students' eyes roll. Say, "We're making (Talker) work too hard today; who else has a thought?" Or simply walk to the side of the class where Talker isn't, so that you can plausibly overlook that raised hand. If Talker is overly persistent, talk with them briefly outside of class to suggest that other students need time to talk as well.
- **If some students are chatting** or surfing the web and not paying attention, first determine whether the offender is distracting other students. If not, then the students involved will deal with the natural consequences of their choice at the time of the next exam, when the questions don't look familiar.
- **If nearby students are being affected**, then you need to deal with the disturbance. Start by gazing steadily at the student while continuing to lecture. At some point, the offender will probably notice. If not, then while continuing to lecture, walk in the student's direction and keep your fixed gaze. Then remain standing nearby. Don't look angry or anxious. Show by your composure that you are not bothered by the small slings and arrows of dealing with elderly teenagers. When the offender looks up, nod and walk away. You will have made the point effectively.
- **What if a student says something incorrect** during discussion? Correct it, gently. Or simply ask for other responses and acknowledge the accuracy of the correct response.
- See: Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, and Schaffer and Greene (both undated) below.

Another good way to encourage discussion while helping students absorb an idea is **"think-pair-share"** (Lightner and Tomaswick 2017). Ask students to spend some time thinking about how they'd answer a particular question or deal with an issue, discuss their idea briefly with a nearby student, and then share the product of their conversation with the class as a whole.

Some instructors follow the practice of "cold-calling" on students – asking individuals to respond without giving them the chance to raise their hands first. The risk, of course, is that some individuals would prefer dying to speaking in public. But if you keep good eye contact with students, you will probably notice one or two who look as though they're on the verge of making a comment, and you can encourage them to follow through.

Leading Discussions Online

Leading a discussion or teaching a course through discussion online can take you into the brave new world of discussion forums, threads, jigsaw groups, snowball prompts, 3C+Q methods, and other new ways of spending your time. If you're into those things, have at it.

It's simplest for most of us to incorporate discussion into our lectures by using synchronous online teaching (in short, when you and the students all log on at the same time; see the section on "Lecturing Online").

In a synchronous online discussion, you can use a platform such as Zoom to structure a discussion for students, in which they can then do the digital equivalent of raising their hands (clicking on the hand icon on their screen) and be called on to speak. They can also input questions and comments in the Chat function, which will appear on your screen for a time and can be accessed later by clicking on "Chat." Or you can permit students to jump in and respond to you or to one another directly.

In a bigger group (more than 10 or 20), the process can get messy, with people talking over one another. It's harder to pick up on people's reactions to your statements online, and it can be stressful for both you and the students to figure out how and when to jump in to make a point without stepping on someone else's input. That's tiring.

But it's doable and can bring productive results. As more employers are moving toward group-based problem-solving and teamwork, you may find that at least some of your students are eager to learn how to master these approaches.

If you choose this path, **run a practice discussion with some group of people first**. Make sure that you know the various options of your online platform and how to access them. It helps to be able to see all the students' screens, to monitor their reactions and "hands."

If the members of your class will never meet in real life, you can enhance discussion by starting some class sessions with a device that helps them get to know one another as individuals. This can seem stilted initially, but the awkwardness usually fades. Ask them each, for instance, to tell about an experience they've had related to the course topic, or to relate something that very few people know about them or that they're proud of. Each student who responds can choose the next class member to respond. You can start doing this as the students begin logging on for the class, so they don't have to wait in silence till you're ready to start teaching.

Alternatively, you can use the Zoom feature of breakout rooms, which divide the students into small groups to discuss some issue or concept and then bring them back together to report the results. You can select the groups yourself, or Zoom will do it for you. Participating in small groups probably increases students' involvement in the discussion section because they can get

to know others in the class, rather seeing them as a group of faces on a screen. This may also help hold students accountable for doing the readings and paying attention in class.

Let them know in advance how much time you've allotted for breakout room discussions, so they'll be prepared to summarize their discussion after a period of time, rather than finding their group suddenly cut off and their focus directed back to the instructor. Fedesco (2020) provides a useful introduction to synchronous online discussions.

How do you at least simulate a discussion when you're teaching online asynchronously? You can post the material you consider useful as introductory to the topic and then use whatever mechanism your institution has for interacting with students online to invite them to offer comments, raise questions, and respond to one another.

If you expect to deal with more than one aspect of a topic, you'll probably need to use "threads" – named sub-sections in which students can react only to comments relevant to that particular issue or comment. Unless you're accustomed to such platforms, have someone set it up for you and guide you through the first session. It's a huge waste of time for everyone to live through an online session characterized by constant glitches.

There are a lot of opportunities for combining approaches, to draw on the advantages of each approach. Fedesco (2020) cites one:

> …have students post a reflection on the discussion board prior to class. For example, [another instructor] asked students something as simple as identifying one idea or question that came to mind as they were reading an article. Rather than responding to each other on the discussion board, she then had students reflect on their post and discuss this during the Zoom session. Telling students that they will be asked to elaborate on their discussion post during the Zoom session can ensure that students have ample time to prepare to engage in the upcoming discussion.

You probably won't feel as satisfied by any of these online discussion methods as you do after a discussion where real, live students can see and talk with one another without the mediation of screens and keyboards and modems. But some of us will be required by our institutions or by circumstances to teach online, and you don't need to forgo discussion if that happens. The Derek Bok Center ("Teaching Remotely," 2022) has a useful set of materials on online teaching and learning.

Learning Students' Names

Some of us find it really hard to learn and remember people's names. But there's value in trying, even in lecture courses. When you call students by name, they feel more engaged in the course, and they probably try harder to do well.

Here's a sneaky trick to make students *think* you've learned all their names. A few students will respond much more frequently than others. If you learn *their* names quickly, and then use their name when you call on them, others will assume you know everyone's name.

How do you learn those participating students' names? You can just ask them when they raise their hands, commenting that you're hoping to learn everyone's names, so you'll need to be obtrusive about asking for names for a few class sessions. When students come up to talk after class, first ask their name. Your roster on the school's online system probably has a link to students' ID photos. Use that to verify a name you've learned.

Try to learn a couple of names after each class period. That adds up. If you're as bad at it as I am, you can even jot down a descriptor or two for those two students ("long ponytail," "looks like Alfred E. Newman"). **Be exceptionally careful not to lose the paper that contains those descriptors.**

6/ How to Get Students to Do the Readings

It's hard. I've had students who claimed that they'd never bought a textbook in their years of college. When I do midterm evaluations, I typically find that about half the students claim to have done the readings – and that's what they *claim***.** That may surprise you. You did the readings! (or most of them?) But then, you probably felt that you'd be shamed or disrespected by faculty and colleagues if you didn't, so the negative consequence mattered more to you than to many undergraduates who don't find academia quite so compelling.

If you expect undergraduates to do the readings, there will need to be some consequence if they don't. It's true that they may do worse on the midterm if they don't do the readings, but given that a "low" grade on an undergraduate exam is often a C, they may feel they can survive the risk – and count on their (likely) well-developed BS skills to get them to a B.

Here are some reasonable consequences to encourage students to do the readings:

- Let them know early in the semester that the exams will cover the readings as well as the lectures, and that some questions will be based exclusively on the readings.

- Start each (or most, or random) class period with a **very brief readings quiz** – a question or two asking about the central point of the day's readings. Don't ask very esoteric questions; you want students to focus on the main points, not to try to outguess you on the less important details. These quizzes should count toward the final grade. If they don't, then they aren't an actual consequence. You could drop the lowest of their scores.

- Hold a longer readings quiz occasionally, and unannounced, which counts toward the final grade.

- Require students to **post a question about the day's readings** the night before class takes place. Award points to those who do or make this a standard element of the final grade.

- Require a weekly or bi-weekly short, written **summary of at least one of the readings**, again with some points attached toward the final grade.

You are not the students' adversary in assigning required readings. You assign readings because the subject you're teaching is vital to your students, and the readings you've chosen were designed to supplement the important material you're presenting in class. You want each student to grasp these important ideas and to gain as much from your course as they possibly can. For that reason, you'll use whatever incentives you can to accomplish that mission. Some unnamed wise person once said, "Education is the only area in society where we don't care if we get what we pay for." Your aim is to undermine that statement while demonstrating that learning about politics and governance is essential to every individual.

7/ Teaching While Female, Young, Black, Latino, LGBT, Nonbinary, or…

We're all familiar with research showing that instructors who fit the traditional image of "Professor" (older, white man) tend to get better teaching evaluations than those who don't. This ought to produce a call for additional means of evaluating teaching. Political science examines a wide variety of institutional biases against relatively powerless groups. We should be particularly concerned not to perpetuate such biases in our own institutions. (For a way to avoid them, see Peterson et al., 2019.)

But you probably aren't holding your breath till that happens, nor should you. We need to work to update our institutional rules while also surviving and thriving till that happens.

Here are some suggestions. Some readers will have normative reactions to each of these, to which they are most welcome. These suggestions are meant to be strictly empirical:

- As a younger instructor, a non-male, or a person of color, **demonstrate by your bearing that you belong in a position of leadership** – not by barking orders but by feeling and showing that you are confident in your role as instructor, that you have important things to teach, and there is no doubt in your mind that students accept you as such. (If you don't, see "The Imposter Syndrome" above.) Keep your approach kind, not defensive.

- Other instructors may have the opposite problem: we may come across as imposing or even frightening, perhaps because of physical size or a forceful voice. In that case, it

would help students feel more comfortable if you were to dial down the authority level by using self-deprecating humor and a more relaxed pose.

- When you are not much older than your students, it's tempting to defuse your fear of negative judgments by acting as the students' "buddy." **It's nice if students like you, but it's better for you as an instructor (and better for your end-of-semester student evaluations) if they *respect* you.** These are students who have recently attended high schools; they have an instinctive feel for the substitute teacher who arrives in class hoping to survive the day by currying favor with the students.

- How do you get them to respect you? **Focus on the material you're presenting and its importance to their lives.**

- **Don't accept disrespect.** If you are disrespected by a student, call them on it – outside of class. Bullies see the world as divided into the people with power and the people who obey. If you make it clear by your bearing that you are the one in power, they will usually revert to the one who obeys. Younger women or nonbinary faculty may occasionally face efforts at pressure or intimidation by large male students. The first remedy is for you to recognize that this is disrespectful. The second is to pull yourself up to your full height, give them a steely look, and state loudly, "SIT DOWN" or "STEP BACK."

- **Dress the part of a faculty member**. You don't need to wear fake glasses or a suit and tie, but especially as a younger woman or nonbinary, Black, or Latino instructor, you'll probably be more vulnerable to students' perceptions that you don't "belong" in front of a classroom if you walk in wearing cutoffs and flip-flops.

An especially big challenge is to maintain a private life while gaining success as a faculty member. That's most clear **when you have the responsibility of care for another, whether the other is a child, an ill or disabled relative, someone with substance abuse issues, or any other relationship requiring your physical and emotional time**. It's clearly not incompatible with academic success, but it does mean that you'll need to work harder and smarter.

One of the first ways to deal with the challenge is to **make sure you have competent help**, whether that's a collaborative partner or a hired service. If you have a spouse or domestic partner, be clear about your needs for free time, quiet space, and flexible scheduling. You are not in a situation where traditional sex-stereotyped gender roles apply, so create new ones based on fairness and empathy.

You'll need more than help; **you'll need support**. When you take responsibility for someone who depends on you, it is natural that you will feel guilty no matter what you're doing: guilty when you aren't with that person, for fear that they have unmet needs, and guilty when you are, because you aren't taking that moment to do research or prepare to teach.

Congratulations! You're normal! The guilt will always be there. It's on you to remember that guilt does not help you make dinner or analyze data; it just gets in the way. You have lots of company, and you can't give resources you don't have, including time and feelings.

You might also consider adapting your teaching preparation and research activity to changes in your personal obligations. When you're facing a time of high personal demands, now is not the time to volunteer to teach a new course, even if your chair really wants it done and even if you had always dreamed of doing so. You want to strive for as few new teaching preparations as possible at high-stress times, so rely on your existing lecture notes combined with the comments you've added after you gave that lecture last time.

If you can, **design your research interests so that they can fit into the time you have.** If you are a political philosopher who needs long days of uninterrupted quiet to produce intricate reasoning about profound issues, that maybe hard to do while delivering one kiddo to preschool at 8:30 and picking up another from kindergarten at noon. Be creative in finding alternatives – focus, for instance, on writing shorter pieces, keeping in mind that your current circumstances will not be permanent.

If you can, nurture your ability to **match your available time slots with tasks that can be completed during those time slots**. For instance, if you know that you have half an hour free during an afternoon, complete a task that takes half an hour. Look up a topic for a lecture. Classify a media article for a content analysis. Fill out paperwork required for an internal review. Those half hours – even those ten-minute spans – add up, especially when you can add them to the amount of sleep you get. The benefits you gain from this efficiency more than make up for the pleasures you'd otherwise get from staring into space or scrolling on Facebook or Instagram.

Explore your department's or university's policies on taking leave, whether paid (I hope) or unpaid, when an emergency or ongoing crisis occurs and you can't handle your normal teaching load. Know the law as to what kinds of leave you're entitled to; don't work yourself into oblivion just because an administrator doesn't feel like checking on changes in the law.

Find your tribe. That's important for all of us, but especially for those who have additional personal responsibilities. You won't be as able to share your needs or get advice about how to handle a five-year-old's birthday party or a parent's surgery from colleagues who have wives who deal with these matters. It makes an enormous difference to be able to get and give support from people who have been there.

Your tribe may not be in your department. (Or it may, in the form of staff members or administrators.) It may not even be in your university. Instructors with children will often find kindred spirits among the parents or caregivers of other children in their kiddo's gymnastics class or sports team. Those with older, dependent relatives may need to ask at a medical office about available support groups. These relationships and groups can help you find services you need,

share strategies that have worked for others, and simply provide an understanding presence when you feel you are disappearing under the weight of your responsibilities.

We often think of the more visible minorities (women, people of color) as needing support and mentorship. The same is also true of less visible minorities: for instance, the dwindling number of academics who come from families in which no or few members have gone to college. **Colleagues from non-academic backgrounds** (see Van Dam 2022) **may be just as much in need of mentorship** as are those whose differences are more easily seen.

You don't need to share information about your personal circumstances with everyone, or even with everyone who asks. It may not be to your advantage to have senior members of your department's personnel committee familiar with the enormous burden you carry (or it may, depending on the individual). Your personal life is your own; you choose who gets to learn about it. But it can be very helpful to find a colleague with whom you can share your experiences.

Above all, remember what they tell you on airplanes: **put on your own oxygen mask before you adjust anyone else's**. If you aren't breathing, you can't help anyone else.

8/ Grading – the Dark Side of Teaching (and Ways to Make it Easier)

Most of us hate it. Few of us can avoid it. So let's identify strategies for making it bearable. One major challenge is to **develop your own consistent standards** as to what constitutes an A, a B, and so on, especially in an essay answer. You'll probably start with standards that are more appropriate to a grad student in our field than to an undergrad in our classes. Most likely, in short, you'll expect too much of your undergraduate students.

Your institution's grading standards will no doubt claim that the "average" grade is a C. That hasn't been true for decades. The average undergraduate GPA is over a 3.0 (Jaschik 2016). In other words, the average student is above average. In practice, not many instructors award D and F grades except in cases where the student is not attending or hasn't turned in work.

Grade inflation is a challenge. It leaves us with a range of choice from A to C-. But **there are costs to resisting inflationary pressure**. If your class has an average grade of C, you'll seem unfair, and you'll probably suffer in student evaluations. You may disadvantage your students when they compete for graduate admissions or other awards that depend at least in part on GPA. Grade inflation won't be solved individually; it requires collective action.

Deriving Standards for Grading Essays and Papers

Here are **some criteria you can use in grading any given essay** or paper: First, does the response clearly answer the question? Second, how much of the information it provides is

correct? Third, does it provide relevant detail? Does it avoid over-broad generalizations and instead qualify general statements with specifics or examples? Fourth, does it show evidence of material specifically from the lectures and the readings rather than an otherwise sensible answer that could have been obtained from anyone walking past your classroom building at the time? (If you see several of the latter types of answers, adjust your test questions accordingly!)

There are **shortcuts** to keep you from spending more time grading an exam than a student spent writing it. One is to start by reading through a **sample of exam answers** and then picking out one that seems to you to be a clear A, another that's a clear B, and a clear C. (Continue downward, if needed.)

You might identify a B answer as a good regurgitation of what your lectures and readings have said about the topic: one that provides several pieces of correct information with no (or little) misinformation.

An A answer, then, would go beyond regurgitation. It shows insight. It may provide more evidence than the B answer does. It may demonstrate sophistication in relating the evidence to other concepts important to the class. It may rephrase the concept in a way that convinces you of the writer's understanding of several facets of the concept. A C answer is one with fewer pieces of correct and relevant evidence. It probably contains some misinformation as well. It doesn't convince you that the writer has a grasp of the central core of the concept.

Suppose your sample of answers doesn't produce much variety. Then you might **look for the answers of students you expect to have done well or poorly** (keeping in mind that our expectations are not always fulfilled). Is there a student whose comments in class have struck you as well-founded? On the other end of the scale, is there a student whose face looked unfamiliar to you when he turned in the bluebook? Start there and see if you can identify exemplars of A, B, and C answers. Or create exemplars yourself, at least in general terms.

Then **set these three exemplars in front of you to serve as a guide** while you read through the other exams. Does the next essay or paper resemble more closely the A exemplar, the B, or the C? If the logic is a bit stronger than the B exemplar, then you have a B+. If it's less detailed or comprehensible than the C exemplar, then you have a C- (or, gasp, even a D).

I find it most efficient to **grade all the answers to one essay question, across all students**, before turning to the next question, rather than read through one student's whole exam before turning to the next student. This method better allows me to compare students' answers with one another. My grading becomes even more efficient when I write exams that include several short essays rather than one longer essay, because I'm less likely to need to re-read the essay before determining a grade.

While reading an answer, it's helpful to **underline each of the discrete, relevant points** made in it. That helps me figure out which end of the grading scale I'm moving toward: if I

haven't underlined much, that's not good. It can also be a useful means of letting the student know how many different points you see in the essay, as opposed to the same point made several times using different language. In particular, when I ask students to define a term and then discuss its importance to the course's subject matter, students who answer the second part by repeating the first part can see that I'm still looking for their response to the second part.

Always **provide a few comments** in addition to a grade for each essay. State the things the writer did well and those you'd like to see improved in the next exam. Be sure to include the former. Our better students need feedback as much as our weaker students, and they don't get that from an unadorned "A." As mentioned under "Tests" above, these comments can reflect the standards you've described to students: Did they show clear understanding of the concept? Use relevant examples and evidence and explain them well? Avoid over-broad generalizations? Discuss some implications of the concept?

Keep copies of the best answer or two to each question. Then, when students come to ask how to do better, read out the exemplar essay, have the student read out their answer, and both of you can compare the two. Having students read their answers aloud helps them see what they actually wrote, rather than what they might be reading into their answer while reviewing it silently.

Comparing an answer with an exemplar helps students understand more fully what you hope to see. There's limited value in writing comments such as "be clearer" on a student's essay. If the writer knew how to do that, presumably the essay would show it. Your comments can be very valuable for the student's learning. But commenting on an essay takes time. It helps to keep a list of suggestions, from which you can quickly draw relevant comments. Instead of "be clearer," you could suggest, "provide more examples," or "be careful not to over-generalize."

You could compile sets of the best answers to each exam question and distribute them to students. That clarifies what you're looking for in grading and it may increase students' understanding. But it will also show up in dorms' and greek houses' exam files, which requires you to use different questions next semester.

Some instructors use **rubrics** to guide their grading. Sharing the rubric with students can help them anticipate what you want to see. I've never found it useful to attach a specific number of points to each element of the rubric. I don't know how many points out of 20 ought to be assigned to "clearly defines the concept" as opposed to "provides examples where appropriate." It's possible to grade holistically while still making your grading standards clear.

Finally, **assign numerical grades**, not just letter grades. There are standard scales for translating a B- or a C+ into points on each essay question. That's much easier for you to calculate final grades.

What about Students with Poor Writing Skills?

Should you grade at least in part on an answer's spelling and grammar? Bad grammar and spelling can interfere with your ability to comprehend what the student is saying. On the other hand, do you want to penalize students whose pre-college education has been deficient or whose English is shaky? That's up to you. Be sure that you tell students in advance if you plan to grade at least in part on their writing skills.

If you correct spelling and grammar without offering other comments on a student's essay, the student will conclude that you graded *solely* on spelling and grammar. If you feel you must circle misspelled words or write "awk" next to a supremely creative sentence, but you haven't taken that into account in your grading, be sure to say so.

If you find a student's writing skills distracting, mention that in your comments on the essay. You can remind students that they'll be looking for jobs before long, and that a Human Resources screener looking through ten applications for a position, in which six showed grammar and spelling mistakes, could regard that an easy basis on which to winnow those applications – and it wouldn't be unfair, given that the new hire's supervisor will be reading that employee's written reports. As the HR person, I wouldn't want to field complaints from those supervisors about the poor communication skills of the employee I had sent forward.

You can do more: **refer the student to whatever remedial writing services** your institution maintains. Point out that when students graduate, they will not find any such free source of writing improvement at their first job.

Be watchful for other elements in students' writing that may inadvertently bias your grading. **Be sure that you aren't rewarding opinions or partisanship that resemble your own** or punishing a student who disagrees with you. Poor handwriting doesn't necessarily indicate poor thinking. (There may be some cases, however, in which a student's handwriting is so unintelligible that you need to have them read the essay to you out loud, just in order to decipher it. In these cases, recommending improvement in handwriting is certainly sensible.)

Exams held during the semester take place in a different environment from final exams. The **quality of your students' final exams may disappoint you**. That will be less true if you keep in mind that at finals time, students are transitioning emotionally and physically to leaving campus for home, studying for several courses at once, and taking a last opportunity to socialize with friends. It's very likely that a decline in the quality of their exam answers will result. You may want to make the exams you hold earlier in the semester a bit harder as a result, to encourage students to get in the habit of preparing for them, or to assign the final exam grade a lower weight in the course grade than you had planned.

Grading on a Curve?

If you're grading an exam with essay and/or short answer ID questions, then you're probably implicitly grading on a curve. You may have an optimal A+ answer in mind, but chances are good that you'll adjust your ideal answer to reflect the best of the actual answers you get.

If you've used a multiple-choice exam, then grading on a curve could become relevant. If you find that nobody's in the A/A- (90-100) range, and most students fall into the C range (70-79) or even the D range (60-69), it may be that keeping those low scores could motivate some students to work harder (or, perhaps even more likely, to drop the course).

But there are other explanations for poor test scores. Was the test too hard? Were the items ambiguous? You can check for these empirically. If you can **get an item analysis of the students' answers**, find out whether a number of questions were answered correctly by fewer than 50 percent of the students. That probably means the test questions were too tough. When you write the next exam, think about focusing your items on the main points you tried to get across and write the response options clearly, without unnecessary verbiage.

Using that item analysis, if you find that those who scored highest on the overall test were no more likely to get an individual item right than were those who scored lowest (say, in the bottom third of test-takers), then it's likely that several items were worded ambiguously. If so, then you need to make sure that all the incorrect response options to your multiple-choice items are the opposite of the correct response.

In both cases, you might want to curve the scores. You could pick the highest score and establish the "A" category as within ten points of that score, and then set the lower grade categories successively ten points down from there. Or set whatever is the mean score as a C+ or B- (or whatever grade you choose) and then set the intervals above and below that score.

Another possible explanation for a set of bad exams is that you might not have communicated the material as well as you hoped. Then, in addition to curving the scores, look seriously at your lecture material to make sure you're being clear and well-organized.

Decide before the final exam whether you will round up final point totals, and what interval will trigger rounding up (half a point? One point?). You can also let students know that you will round up if the student's scores have been rising consistently during the semester.

Identifying and Responding to Cheating and Plagiarism

The best way to avoid plagiarism and cheating is to structure your assignments to discourage it from happening in the first place. In an in-class exam, wander around the classroom with your eyes on the students; that will reduce the opportunities to cheat.

You can also structure papers to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism. **Make the assignment very specific.** Change the assignment each semester. Provide a series of questions the student needs to answer in the paper. Require a paper proposal early in the semester, so students must choose their paper topics early.

Some instructors use online programs designed to catch similarities between any paper and material in a published source. One such program is "**Turnitin**"; students submit their papers directly to that program, and it identifies any identical sequence between the student's paper and one of the works in its database.

Alternatively, watch for papers in which the subject matter doesn't match the assignment or where the level of sophistication of the writing seems unusual. Plagiarized papers are often easy to spot; those who feel the need to cheat aren't normally the most proficient students.

If you suspect a student has cheated on an exam or paper, keep the paper; don't return it to the student. In class, when you hand papers back, ask the student to come to your office. Then, while you hold the paper, ask for further explanation of a point. Quote from the paper and ask the student to elaborate. Students who plagiarize often don't read what they're copying. If the student is unable to provide an explanation, it's reasonable to infer plagiarism.

Your school undoubtedly has a policy on the penalties for academic misconduct. It will probably be broad. Treat it seriously. Cheating is a primary academic crime. Being ignorant isn't a crime; it's why we need teachers. But choosing to copy someone else's work is a pernicious choice. Consider how you'd feel if you later went to an accountant or a health care worker who got that job after having cheated through school. For the same reason, consider writing a memo to the Dean of Students about the incident, so that a student who cheats in more than one course can be found out and removed by the institution as a whole.

Don't let these concerns tempt you to view students as adversaries, however. When you construct the rules of an assignment to discourage cheating, you won't get much cheating – and in any case, it's much more productive to think of your students as partners in the act of learning rather than as miscreants searching for a way to deceive you. Don't take it personally.

Study Guides?

On exams, you want to catch students at their best, not at their worst. One of the easiest ways to do that is to **provide (a week or so in advance of the exam) a list of the main terms** you've covered to that point in the course. They can guide their studying by defining these terms and considering why each term is significant to the topic of the course. If you include IDs or short essays on your exam, you can draw the terms from that list. Essay questions can also be based on the list of terms. You could also provide a practice set of essay questions from which you'll choose those included on the exam.

You'll want to make it a fairly long list, so that you don't encourage students to ignore any substantial parts of the course content. For eight weeks' worth of teaching, you should be able to identify at least 25, and probably 30-40, important terms. Post the list online, so that students who can't attend class on a given day don't miss it.

Extra Credit?

Students often ask about it. Many of them had extra credit opportunities in high school. Providing these opportunities lets students raise their grade in return for some form of extra work. That can reduce the pressure on students who get poor grades on their assigned work.

If the opportunity requires meaningful work (for instance, attending a city council meeting and writing a paper about a topic discussed there), **some students may benefit**. If it's less substantive (e.g., attending a talk at which they're just required to sign in – or ask a friend to do so for them), then you may be giving a better final grade to students whose performance is not comparable to others receiving that same grade.

If you do allow extra credit, ask students to request it, and agree on their extra assignment, prior to the final exam. That will increase your chances of ending the semester when the semester ends.

A variant on extra credit is to assign a substantial piece of written work, such as a research paper or similar effort, only for students who want a grade above a C (or whatever grade you choose) in your class. That lets students do additional work to benefit their grade while at the same time permitting you to limit your paper-grading to those students likely to provide you with well-prepared assignments.

Keep these thoughts in mind: College instructors are not required to give extra credit. Remorse over not having worked harder sooner can be the best tool for teaching some students to work harder next semester. College students are old enough to join the armed forces, support themselves, and have babies. It is not too much to ask them to remember due dates and do their best the first time.

9/ Non-class Teaching: Supervising Internships, Readings Courses, Honors Theses, Advising Clubs – and Office Hours

Most departments get lots of requests for faculty to supervise students who intern in the state legislature or city council, who need some credit hours of readings, want to write an honors thesis, or need a faculty sponsor for their student group. The catch is that **most departments give faculty members no credit for doing so, in the form of courses off, extra salary, or credit toward tenure or promotion**.

As a result, most continuing faculty members do what they can to avoid this costly service. It's the free rider problem; the department benefits from having more student enrollments and giving students opportunities that wouldn't otherwise be available. But because faculty members get no tangible benefits in return, and often pay tangible costs (in time and effort) for assuming these roles, most of your colleagues will probably avoid such requests. The same can be true of serving on faculty committees. You may be asked to take on responsibilities that, if you are not yet tenured and promoted, you are not likely to benefit from.

Some departments are very protective of their newest colleagues and of all untenured colleagues. Hurray for them. If yours isn't one of the enlightened ones, think carefully before you say yes to these opportunities.

Which Opportunities Should You Avoid, and How You Can Do That

There will be some assignments you should accept. If your department chair asks you to serve on a committee, you'll need to do that. You want to be known as a good colleague; if you're able to help the chair with a bothersome task, the chair may be more inclined to help you later.

On the other hand, if an assistant associate dean asks you to serve on a task force to consider alternatives for reform of the rules for submitting completed dissertations to the Graduate School, you can probably safely turn it down (or ask your chair to tell the assistant associate dean that you have too many other obligations already). If you don't, you'll be amazed to learn how many hours faculty members can spend debating and writing reports that will never make the slightest difference to anybody.

When you accept a non-classroom assignment, be sure you know the formal and informal rules that govern it. If you're asked to sponsor an internship, find out whether your department specifies what interns must do. What written work (and how much of it) are they required to complete? Does their supervisor in the legislature (or wherever) get to determine part of the intern's grade? Should you be in regular contact with the supervisor during the semester? Is an internship evaluated with a letter grade or a pass/fail? How often should you meet with the intern? In short, how much of your time will be involved if you agree to sponsor the student?

With honors thesis students, will you need to teach them how to conduct a social-scientific study, or does the department have a seminar showing honors students how to phrase a topic or hypothesis, what sources are appropriate, how to gather data, and so on? If you're asked to sponsor a club, will you be expected to attend every meeting, or do they just need your signature on a form?

Here's a **suggestion for an internship assignment**. Rather than assign The Term Paper, consider requiring a journal in which the intern writes a paragraph or two each day or week about what they have *learned from* the internship. Provide a sample of journal entries to show

that you don't want to hear about the specific tasks the student undertook during the day, but rather how their experiences as an intern compare with their previous learning about political science. If the student attends a legislative committee hearing, how did it compare with what they learned in previous classes about legislative committees? What has the intern learned about the amount and types of contact between a legislator and members of the public – and therefore about the nature and challenges of representing a constituency?

Students can gain a lot from internships, honors theses, and other non-class experiences. Honors thesis students can learn how research is done. Interns can find out what it's like to serve in a legislative body or a prosecutor's office. Internships can lead to job offers. These opportunities can also be provided via an undergrad Careers in Political Science course offered by your department. (I can offer a sample syllabus.)

But **always weigh these opportunities against your longer-term needs in the department**: to get tenure and promotion in a field in which, in most departments, teaching activity is valued less than research productivity, and within teaching activity, classroom teaching pulls more weight than does your outside-of-class effort in supervising students.

If you're inclined to say no to one of these opportunities, try this: First, **always ask that these offers be made in writing;** it's much easier to say no in writing than in person. Then create a prototype email or letter to respond to requests that you feel are likely to cost more than they benefit you. Start the email by expressing gratitude for having been asked. Follow with a long paragraph detailing all the other tasks that you are responsible for: not just your teaching assignments (and anything especially onerous about them, such as the size of a lecture course or the amount of written work that will need to be graded) but also any committees you already serve on or other roles you fulfill within the department (e.g., advising some number of students). The longer this paragraph is, the better. Finally, express regret that because of all these other demands on your time, you wouldn't be able to do justice either to all these responsibilities or the assignment you've been offered.

Office Hours

Your office hours are another opportunity to teach students – if you can get them to come. Especially in large universities, very few students will take the opportunity to show up during office hours. Yet talking with students one-on-one can encourage a level of learning that doesn't always happen in the classroom.

How do you get students to come to office hours? **The easiest method is to require them to do so**. In smaller classes (up to 30 students), you can ask them to make an initial visit to your office, perhaps to consult about the topic of the paper they're assigned to research. This visit can be short; focus on the topic, the student's background, and on communicating that office hours are not intimidating.

Another option is to start with ***group* office hours**: invite three or four students to attend office hours together, so they can get to know one another as well as you. Hold office hours in the library cafeteria or some other accessible location. Students with personal questions can arrange to talk with you privately at another time.

When you talk individually with a student, it's sensible to **keep your office door open**. If someone wants to discuss a personal problem, ask whether the student would prefer closing the door.

Tell students when you'll respond to emails and how soon they should expect an answer. If you prefer to receive emails only till 5 pm, let them know. May they contact you by phone? At home? Schedule your office hours at convenient times; if you hold them both Mondays and Wednesdays at 1 pm, students who have a conflicting class on Monday probably have the same conflict on Wednesday.

10/ Safety and Civility – In and Outside of Class

As we tell our students, environmental change has a potent impact on people's choices. Incivility is not new in American life. It's not even new in academia. A grad school colleague of mine who began teaching art history in the early 1970s at a small college reported that when he posted a slide showing a rare medieval tapestry, a voice from the back of the darkened room called out, "I wouldn't wipe my ass on that." (I wish the instructor had responded, "You're right; that tapestry is worth a whole lot more than your ass.")

Preventing Uncivil Behavior

But incivility in classrooms is more common now (see Knepp, 2012). Rather than worry about it, **structure your class to make it less likely to occur**. You'll avoid a lot of uncivil behavior simply by showing that you are confident in your role as instructor. (If you don't feel confident, see "The Imposter Syndrome.") It helps to remind yourself, "I belong here. I am trained as a political scientist, and my training and ideas are important to convey to these students."

Just as you set the tone during exams to ward off cheating, by making a show of looking around for cheat sheets or notes at students' feet, structure your class to show that you expect civility and cooperative behavior. **Demonstrate respect for your students and their questions but make it clear through your demeanor and your handling of the class that you are in charge**. People who are truly in charge don't need to state that they are in charge. But they can say, "I'd like you to rephrase that question more respectfully," or, "That's an interesting question, but we don't have time to deal with it now. You're welcome to ask it in office hours."

Remember that it's best to **aim for your students' *respect*, not their *friendship***. Those who like you personally may rate you high in student evaluations on items such as whether they

enjoyed the class. But that may not carry over into evaluation items such as "I learned a lot in this class." It's tempting to try to get students on your side with friendly comments or jokes about beer-drinking, but these do not help you establish your status as the instructor.

Think ahead to situations that might otherwise catch you off guard. What are if a student walks out of class looking angry or upset? What if some students in the back of the room are chatting? There's no "right" answer to these questions. Talk with colleagues, develop a repertoire of responses you're comfortable with, and remember that you're responding on behalf of the other students who prefer civil behavior.

If you ever feel uncomfortable about a situation with a student, document it. Did a student show anger in class at a disruptive level? Write it down – what happened, when, where – and keep any correspondence related to it, including downloaded e-mails. If it turns out to be nothing, then the only cost to you has been a small amount of time.

But **don't let the possibility of incivility, or even its occurrence, sour you on teaching**. Research on negativity bias (Ito et al., 1998; Tversky and Kahneman, 1992) shows that negative experiences weigh more heavily in our thinking than do positive experiences, so it's tempting to devote disproportionate attention to the one prospective pain in the rear rather than to the much larger number of students who want to do what's asked of them.

The happy medium is to look forward to honest and civil behavior by students, while also having a set of explicit rules as to what constitutes cheating and incivility and the penalties for violating those rules, and then simply enforcing those rules if needed.

Resolving Student Complaints

On occasion, a student can't let go of their objection to a grade or has some other basis for complaining about a faculty member. It's best if you can resolve these at the course or department level, rather than let them fester or involve higher-level administrators.

If a student complains that a decision you made is unfair, is it covered by the syllabus? Can your department's Director of Undergraduate Studies cite a policy that applies to the situation? Can the DUS listen to both sides and offer a solution? Can another colleague serve as mediator? In these litigious days, it's a good idea to remain respectful of the student's concerns and to be willing to back off of the ramparts on relatively minor matters.

Civility toward Other Class Members

… must be maintained. We owe it to one another. Remind students that democracy is about being able to manage disagreement. Disagreement is inevitable when different people come

together. Democratic norms don't demand agreement; rather, they help people disagree without violence. One of those norms is mutual respect.

Enforcing mutual respect in the classroom makes learning possible. Effective learning happens in conditions of what psychologists call moderate cognitive arousal. Too little cognitive arousal leads to boredom and inattention. Too much leads to motivated attention: not listening to any side but their own (see Bolson et al., 2014 and Nickerson, 2021).

We've experienced the results of polarization in our classes. Many students have been exposed to public figures who are "conflict entrepreneurs" (Ripley 2021), who work to engender outrage on any issue they can use for their own gain. We know how unpleasant that can make our lives, and it doesn't help attract undergrads to the study of political science.

So if a student responds to another's comment by ridiculing it, or by making a sexist or racist remark or one disrespectful to a particular point of view, remind the student that mutual respect is vitally important both for a democratic polity and learning political science; restate the comment (if you can) more respectfully, and then use the moderated level of conflict to produce greater understanding of other people's ideas.

Keeping Students Safe

You'll probably never have to deal with violence in your class. But if it ever happens, you won't have the luxury of time to consider how to respond. So give it a thought in advance. When you look around your classroom before the semester begins, while the room is still uninhabited, take a moment to think about how you'd protect your students if a threat occurred.

Would the students be safer by exiting the classroom and the building or by staying put? Have a cell phone available so you can check. If you need to get your students outside, does the classroom have two doors? If not, do the windows open? If opening them requires a little L-wrench, make sure one is taped inside the computer stand or somewhere else accessible to you.

If you can't be sure whether students would be safer in the hallway or outdoors, check to see whether the classroom doors lock. Is there a heavy table or desk that can be pushed up against the door? In which corner of the room would students be least visible from the doorway or a window? Now that you've identified your options, put your worry aside.

What to Do about Device Use in Class and Non-Attendance

Many students use laptops in class to take notes. But **the presence of laptops and other devices enables students to find distractions from the class material** (and to be found by them). Research confirms that most students use their devices at some point during class to do things other than take notes – for instance, to text friends (Tindell and Bohlander, 2011).

Colleagues who ban laptops in class have often received blowback from their students, who aren't accustomed to writing by hand. Banning devices, then, has costs. You could ask students to sign a contract on the first day of class that they will use their phones or devices only for class purposes. And you can interfere with the lure of text messages without banning phones; students will be less distracted by their devices if the class is engaging, active, and participatory.

Many undergraduates hold part-time or even full-time jobs. Their other obligations may conflict with your class. They may learn as much from borrowing other students' notes and doing the readings as do those who attend class regularly but spend class time watching TikTok on their laptops. On the other hand, it's reasonable to ask whether we can teach them if they aren't there.

You can measure attendance without having to "call the roll" or circulate an attendance sheet. One way is to require in-class writing often during the semester. That lets you quickly monitor whether most students are understanding important concepts while also determining who showed up that day. Short writings don't take much time to read. And if you briefly summarize their answers, in the next class, students can see that you care about their learning.

If you gather attendance data during the first few weeks of the semester, you can **email students who have missed a substantial number of classes**. Tell them you're concerned about their absence and ask if they need help. That often increases attendance.

A Note about Partisan or Ideological Bias

Critics commonly charge that college instructors, especially in the social sciences, work hard to indoctrinate impressionable kids with radical ideas. To those of us who can despair at how little of our course content actually shows up in students' exam answers, these criticisms misstate not only the intent but also the impact of college teachers.

Whether or not most political scientists identify as liberals in their personal beliefs is irrelevant if our primary aim is to teach students what empirical, scientific research finds to be valid about who turns out to vote, how political parties are organized, and how much power congressional committees have in shaping legislation compared with legislative party leaders.

The charge weakens further when we consider that students have spent their first 18 years being imbued with the perspectives of their parents and their local community. If these long-taught political orientations can be reversed by exposure to a class twice a week for a semester, then the new information provided by that class must be remarkably persuasive.

It's tempting, then, to think of these charges of academic indoctrination as a strategy for putting college teachers on the defensive, causing them to self-censor by giving more time than

is justified to anti-liberal points of view and presenting research that supports liberal viewpoints in a more hesitant, conditional manner.

Faculty members differ as to whether instructors should express normative views in their lectures. One position is that if students know their faculty member's ideological biases, they will be better equipped to take those biases into account. The challenge is that in these polarized times, it's just as likely that the student will dismiss even the factual material provided by an instructor who uses class time to express personal political views that differ from the student's.

An alternative is to present both (or many) sides of an issue along with a fair characterization of their respective arguments. Whenever a student raises a point that favors one side, restate the point, and then ask, "What would you say if someone on the other side said…?" Then, you can conclude, "So here are the main arguments on one side, … and on the other side…" You can follow with further discussion of the evidence and political tools each side uses to get its argument accepted, or what public opinion measures show on the issue. Acting as devil's advocate allows you to bring up a range of viewpoints, encourage students to think analytically, and maintain your position as an instructor, not a suspected "indoctrinator."

We also need to train students to evaluate the factual basis of pieces of evidence and to distinguish facts from false statements artfully disguised as facts. Remind them to ask whether the source of a particular bit of information has a stake in getting one side of the issue accepted. If the source is a political group, encourage students to look up the group and see who funds it. Suggest that it's just as important to fact-check statements they agree with as statements they disagree with.

Note that when we discuss controversial issues in class and present the various arguments made by different sides, **it's important to avoid the trap of false equivalence** (Hershey 2017: 121): presenting an accurate statement and an inaccurate statement as equally plausible. In discussing civil rights, for instance, we can find arguments by some groups that White Americans are now more discriminated against than Black Americans are, or that President Biden was elected in 2020 due to massive, nationwide voter fraud.

We can examine those arguments and attribute them to the specific groups that defend them. But the norms of fairness and impartiality do not require us to present fantastical claims as being on an equal footing with claims that have supporting empirical evidence. We and our students are capable of examining the evidentiary basis for such claims: defining what "discrimination" and "voter fraud" are and searching for empirical evidence as to whether such claims are accurate. Fairness does not require our class time to be hijacked by wackos.

This is not an easy time to teach about American politics. The example set by many national political leaders has encouraged some students to feel that everything is a matter of opinion and that their own opinion must be made clear at every opportunity. But in the same

sense, this is a time when demonstrating how to structure reasoned and respectful discussion is critical for preserving a democratic society. **You can make a real difference by modeling how to hold a mutually respectful class discussion, even on the most controversial topics**.

Dealing with Students Outside of Class

You'll have lots of opportunities to get to know students if you choose to do so. They can come to your office hours with questions or ideas. You can chat with them right before or after class. You can nominate especially outstanding students for university awards or scholarships. You can invite them to do an internship, an honors thesis, or directed readings. You can write letters of recommendation for them.

Aside from that, be careful. **Don't "friend" your students on Facebook or other social media until they are no longer in your class**. Many students still believe that they will get a better grade if they flatter or develop a personal relationship with the instructor. I once responded to a request from the local chapter of my college sorority that they needed an alum present at sorority rush. I complied and was introduced to several members of the house. The next day in lecture, I found five young women wearing that sorority's greek-letter sweatshirts sitting in the front row of my lecture hall with big smiles on their faces. I wouldn't have dreamed of advantaging those young women because of an assumed "connection." But other students in the class could have observed that change in behavior or heard the girls' comments about their new fashion statement and assumed that a bias could exist.

Colleagues differ as to whether taking public stances on issues or candidates undermines our role as professionals. **It's possible to teach in a nonpartisan manner while still taking active part in partisan political life as a private citizen**; our employment should not disqualify us from the rights of other citizens. But we need to be very clear that our private affiliations do not influence our evaluation of any student's work.

11/ Working with Teaching Assistants

Serving as a TA is a great opportunity, but it's also a challenge. A TA has big responsibilities, but students in the class know that the course instructor makes the big decisions. It's a form of adolescence for twenty-somethings.

Specifying a TA's Responsibilities and Opportunities

Instructors of record can make the TA experience more productive by **stating clearly its opportunities and its limits.** One opportunity is to gain experience as lecturers. It's intimidating to a TA to be handed an entire class period to fill, especially with the instructor sitting in the audience. Instead, you might ask which course topic(s) especially interest the TA and then assign 15 or 20 minutes of the relevant class period for the TA to present material on that topic. Talk

constructively afterward about the particular strengths of the presentation and what could be done better next time and write a note for the TA's file emphasizing the former.

What will be the TA's responsibilities? To attend every class? Sit in a particular place so that students know where to find their TA? Should the two of you hold office hours at the same time each week, so that you can communicate, or at a different time, to increase the chance that students find one of you in the office? How much grading will the TA do? If a student objects to a TA's grading, can the student come directly to you, or should the student talk with the TA first?

Grading is where the rubber meets the road for TAs. It's also the task most instructors hate most. So it's tempting to think of assigning *all* the grading to the TA. Tempting – but ill-advised. Instructors need to assess their students' progress. We know what we said in class, but we can't be sure what they heard unless we read their exams and papers. Exams aren't optimal as assessment measures, but we don't have a lot of alternatives. So it's unwise to hand the TA a pile of bluebooks and limit our instructions to, "I'd like these back by Thursday" – unless you're using only machine-scorable questions.

You could provide the TA/grader with a rubric, stating that a given essay response should include points a, b, and c for an A answer, a and b for a B answer, and only one of those for a C. You could select a random sample of bluebooks to grade yourself and offer the TA examples of A, B, and C answers to each question. You could establish grading criteria by meeting with your TA, reading through some students' answers to each question together, indicating what grade you would give each answer, and explaining why you selected that grade.

You could ask the TA to grade a certain number of answers to each exam question and then discuss the grading criteria. That lets you communicate your own criteria and then, if the TA's grading average is lower or higher than yours, tell the TA to systematically raise or lower their grades by as many points as necessary to match your own scoring. If your course has several sections and TAs, make sure their average exam grades are comparable.

Just as students' written work should be a learning experience for them, getting their papers back can also be a learning experience. That happens when the grader explains what the student did well and what he or she needs to do better (see section 7 on grading), either in response to each essay or the exam overall. Doing so takes time, but TAs (and you) will become more efficient as you evaluate more students' answers.

Don't wait too long to hand back exams and papers. Although many students may do nothing more than note their grade and recycle the bluebook, those who are motivated to learn are better able to do so if they get comments back soon after taking the exam.

When you hand back the exams or papers, be careful not to undercut the role of your TA. **Encourage students to ask questions about their exam or paper but tell them to first talk**

with the person who graded it. If that's the TA, and if the student is unsatisfied with the outcome, talk with *both* the undergraduate and the TA together. Focus the discussion on differences between the student's answer and the exemplar answer you've drawn from that exam (see the section on grading). The focus should be on showing the undergraduate how to do better on the next exam and other assessment devices used in the course. If you overrule the TA on grading (which shouldn't be necessary if the two of you have worked closely during the grading process), that encourages students to do end-runs around the TA. That's a problem for both you and the TA.

Working with Undergraduates as Teaching Assistants

If your department doesn't have a graduate program, or if you'd like to schedule more discussion sections than your TA allotment will allow – or if you would like to give some especially capable undergraduates a taste of what it's like to teach political science at the university level – then **look for one or more undergrads who may have the capacity to do some teaching**.

How do you choose them? You'll feel more confident in choosing students you've already had in class. Look for students who may be considering grad or professional school.

Be explicit in advance about the types of tasks they will perform. Will they meet with undergrads in the class to talk about assignments? Will they have a chance to give a part of a lecture? Will they play a role in grading, and if so, how will you train them to do evaluations?

Involving capable undergrad assistants in grading isn't much different from working with TAs. Read through answers together, discuss the criteria you use, and come to consensus as to what standards are to be used. You can have the undergrad TA pencil in a grade and comments, which are then reviewed by you and discussed with the undergrad TA.

Meeting with these undergrads weekly can be a valuable learning experience for them. If they've taken the class before, they may absorb the course material in a new way. Some departments provide a small stipend to undergrad TAs. Others provide internship credits. All of them will gain a deeper understanding of the process of gathering and communicating information, which can enhance their preparation for any career.

12/ Student Evaluations

Many academics don't trust student evaluations (often for good reasons). They take valuable class time. They may be biased against women faculty, though findings are not always consistent (CRLT 2021). Averages can be skewed by one cranky student who happened to show up in class that day. But they are the least costly method for promotion committees to evaluate your

teaching. They are also a way for you to find out what students valued in your class and what they would like to see changed.

Don't wait till the end of the semester to conduct an evaluation. Midterm is a good time to conduct your own first assessment: a questionnaire in which you ask students what sections of the course they've learned the most and the least from, how much of the readings they've done, how useful they feel the readings and lectures are, how they feel about the grading, and what they'd like to see changed in the course.

In the next class, tell them what they said. That helps them understand that their learning matters to you. It can also help students realize that not everyone agrees with their views on everything. Some students will like the readings, some won't. Some people learned a lot from the section on ___; others just finished another class on that topic and didn't gain a lot from the repetition. Let students know that you're trying your best to respond to a range of preferences.

Don't schedule your evaluations on the day after you hand back an exam or a paper. You want to capture their reactions to the whole course, not to the grade they just got.

If your department requires end-of-semester student evaluations, then you'll want the largest possible proportion of students respond to the questions. Low response rates tend to reflect the most extreme views – and the most negative. Evaluations conducted online generally have low response rates (Ahmad, 2018). So **if your institution requires online evaluations, have the students respond online during class time**. Ask them to bring their laptops or other devices on a given day and allot ten or fifteen minutes for them to take the evaluation.

Then read the results. Most of us tend to remember the most critical comments the longest. Keeping that tendency in mind can help us counteract it.

Promotion and tenure committees won't normally turn you down for not being the best teacher in the college. You can put together a credible case for teaching effectiveness by demonstrating improvement over time, no matter how strong or weak your first set of evaluations was. Remember that most students will be predisposed to evaluate you positively if you show them that you're enthusiastic about teaching and that you care about their progress.

Most important: **don't take it personally**. Think about student evaluations the way you want students to think about their test grades: focus your attention on how to do better next time.

13/ Demonstrating Your Teaching Effectiveness for Promotion and Tenure

It's easier to demonstrate your research productivity than your teaching effectiveness. Your research is in print, whether in hard copy or online. Article and book reviews and reactions from

colleagues at other institutions are solid evidence of your value as a researcher. Your teaching is not normally accessible to your colleagues, much less to prospective referees at other schools. As a result, **you need to provide the data** – and those data must be assembled over time.

Begin when you first join the department. (If that ship has already sailed, then start now!) Ask for a copy of the **department's requirements** for tenure and promotion and the specific procedures for evaluating teaching. Ask whether these are the same requirements as those used by the College's, School's, and any higher-level promotion and tenure committees that will review your file before you receive promotion and/or tenure.

Make your teaching file as full of helpful information as you can. Otherwise, the promotion and tenure committee will have to fall back on your student evaluation numbers. A fuller set of information will help convince committees that you take your teaching seriously and put effort into it.

Save **copies of all your syllabi**, both in hard copy (some schools still do use paper files) and online. It's also sensible to save copies of the **exams** you give, any other materials you provide students, **a full list of all the courses you've taught, and the number of students enrolled** in each. Courses you've taught at another institution prior to coming to your current department probably don't need to be specified, unless you come up for promotion or tenure very soon after (or coterminous with) being hired.

Save all the written praise you get. Cast aside all modesty; this isn't the time for it. If you receive an email from a student expressing thanks for a lecture or for your help, save it. If you attend a workshop put on by your institution's teaching resources center, document it.

Arrange for at least one peer review. Two is better, so that you can demonstrate improvement. Ask a colleague to sit in on at least one of your classes and write a memo assessing your performance. You'll find a variety of peer review templates online (e.g., see Bandy, 2015), but check first to see if your department uses one particular checklist. As a reviewer, I always plan to write two different reviews: one for the P&T committee and one for the instructor I'm reviewing. The latter review will be more explicit and constructively critical. Offer to exchange classroom visits with a colleague. Video your best lecture(s).

Have someone (not your best friend) content-analyze the open-ended responses to your course evaluations. Don't just pick out the good ones. Do a sampling but put the good ones first.

Assembling a Teaching Portfolio

When you're looking for your first job, or for a different job, prepare a teaching portfolio. Increasingly, hiring departments expect to see a teaching portfolio from each applicant as well as the other standard features of a job application. These portfolios shouldn't take much time to assemble. You'll want to include:

- A one-page statement of **teaching philosophy** (which sounds pretty dry but shouldn't be; just write about your goals for teaching students, describe a challenge you faced in your teaching to date, and explain how you went about solving it
- A list of the courses you've taught and in what capacity (instructor of record, TA)
- The syllabi you've written, and
- A summary of your teaching evaluations for those courses

For suggestions on assembling a teaching portfolio, see Weston and Timmermans (2007) and "Academic Job Search – Teaching Portfolio" (undated). You'll need something similar for your promotion or tenure review, so creating a teaching portfolio as a grad student is a worthwhile investment of your time.

If You Need to Increase Your Student Enrollments

Some colleges and universities have budgetary systems that reward departments for increasing the number of students enrolled in their courses. If you hope for tenure or promotion in one of these colleges, you're probably hoping to grow your own enrollments. Here are some methods:

- Prepare a flyer (with eye-catching art) for each of your next semester's courses, urging students to sign up for it and telling them why they'd benefit from the class. Post the flyers in your classroom building, the student union, residence halls, and anywhere else on campus where a lot of students gather. Send online copies to colleagues in other departments who might be willing to show it to their students.

- Remind this semester's students of what you're teaching next semester.

- Ask your department to place an ad in the student newspaper featuring next semester's classes.

- If your enrollment system asks students to enter a few key words to bring up courses they might find interesting, be sure to name your course beginning with some interesting key words (i.e., not "topics in…," "systems of…," "the government of…").

14/ What If You Aren't in a Tenure-Track Position?

Increasing numbers of political scientists now hold non-tenure-track jobs, as adjunct, visiting, part-time, lecturer, instructor, or other positions, all of which are otherwise known as "insecure." It isn't that untenured, tenure-track faculty are secure, but they are more likely to have long-term contracts, higher pay, access to benefits and perhaps some research resources (Reevy and Deason 2014).

Let's start with the obvious. As members of a profession that teaches about fairness and the impact of institutional norms, **tenured faculty can press their own institutions to move away from this damaging trend,** which is often not as cost-saving as many administrators believe. We can also do what we can to enhance the community within our departments by pushing for voting privileges for our non-tenure-track colleagues and eligibility for resources for teaching and research, and we can treat them with the respect due any colleague.

If you hold a non-tenure-track job, you probably have a heavy (and not fairly compensated) teaching load while also hoping to find the time to research and publish so that you can land a tenure-track position. In addition, you face the challenge that you will be more likely to be seen as a prospective tenure-track hire if you show commitment to the department, but the service required to do that will take valuable time away from other tasks (AFT 2005). (On the other hand, showing such commitment will help you get positive letters of recommendation from colleagues when you apply for other jobs.)

So how do you thrive as a non-tenure-track faculty member? One survival skill is to **try to teach the same courses repeatedly, or more than one section of the same course,** to set limits on your teaching time. Another is to **be clear from the beginning about the terms of your position.**

- What are the methods by which your performance in teaching will be evaluated?
- What benefits (insurance, etc.) will you receive?
- Is there a cap on the number of years you'll be allowed to serve?
- Will you have an office to meet students in person? If not, you'll need to locate a place – in the library, the Student Union – where you can hold regular office hours.
- Will you have opportunities for professional development and promotion?
- What sort of notice must the institution give when your appointment ends?

As you teach, remember to keep all student evaluations, emails that praise your teaching, and other evidence of effective performance. Ask colleagues for peer reviews of your teaching. Attend faculty meetings, if that's possible. If you hope for a tenure-track job, keep a research program going. Try to sleep occasionally.

At the same time, because non-tenure-track colleagues aren't in a position to speak up about their concerns due to their precarious status, that responsibility falls to tenured faculty to make sure that teaching at colleges and universities doesn't become a gig economy.

15/ A Brief Word of Encouragement

College and university teaching, like teaching in other settings, is a huge responsibility. It can seem scary when you're preparing for it. It's also an incredible privilege. And it can be not just deeply rewarding but a lot of fun as well.

You can focus on the frustrations. Your students will usually not be as excited by your topic as you are. That's natural; they aren't teaching it. Your colleagues (and most administrators) may spend lots of time on what you consider to be minor matters, and some of them may not be people you'd seek out as friends. And then you have to grade exams.

As a Disney Princess says, let it go. You have the best job in the world. You get to talk about some of the most interesting topics that exist. You get to choose (within certain limits) which issues to discuss. You get to spend at least part of your day with people who have different backgrounds and concerns, and most of them haven't yet become stodgy and unreachable.

It's a career you've worked for years to achieve. It opens the door for you to have a profound influence on the lives of people who will become public officials, local, state, and even national community leaders, business people, journalists, volunteers, parents. Some of them will contact you, years later, to tell you how great an impact you made on their own careers and their lives. They will be a small percentage of the total number who have been affected by the learning you provided. It is a great privilege to enjoy the development and successes of the people we've taught.

Some of us will be rewarded more handsomely in salary and benefits than others. All of us will be able to remind ourselves that **we are doing the work of democracy**. As Thomas Jefferson wrote, "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education" (letter to William Charles Jarvis September 28, 1820).

It's true that Jefferson wrote these words long after he had retired from active political life and that he probably never attended a faculty meeting. But he knew that **effective teachers are the key to a strong and stable democracy**. In these times, as has been so often true in our past, we teachers are that key. Keep it up; we need you!

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[1]It's not unusual for a Political Science text to cost $100, and an introductory text even more, though the newest hardbacks by James Patterson list at $29. It's not that Poli Sci books are more fascinating than James Patterson's; some might even argue the opposite. It's that textbooks have a captive audience, which book publishers are happy to exploit.