

Professors of political science must recognize that we are often teaching about highly salient topics, many of which have directly touched upon students' lives. Before I taught my first course, I found it helpful to consider this when I thought about what good instruction in political science looks like. We often have students who care deeply about the topic they want to study, which is a wonderful thing, but a challenge that comes with this is that we must teach them to think about political events and outcomes through a social scientific lens—we are not the pundits they see on television. The most important challenge in my eyes is this: how can I maintain and even enhance my students' passion for politics while teaching them about the scientific methods of understanding it? My answer to this challenge can be described by three principles.

*Principle 1: Help students realize there is order to the seemingly random events in politics.*

Students deciding to major in political science have a range of political interests, and to the untrained eye, these phenomena can easily seem disconnected from any meaningful patterns—terrorist attacks, the factors that decide elections, and decisions by major states to intervene or not intervene in conflicts all seem to be random. I spend a portion of my courses teaching students how social science is practiced—observing puzzles, thinking critically about plausible explanations, and attempting to solve the puzzle rigorously—and introducing them to new and different ways to solve puzzles, including quantitative and qualitative research approaches as well as how we learn from other disciplines such as history, sociology, economics, and psychology. My students learn how political scientists pose research questions, how we apply and develop theories to puzzles, and how we incrementally accumulate knowledge about politics by investigating those questions. By the time students complete my course, they have learned that the topics they care deeply about really do have an underlying pattern, and they have the tools to uncover those patterns and understand these topics on a deep level.

*Principle 2: Help students transition from being strictly consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge.*

Students attend university because they want to learn about the world, and many want to improve the world by producing new knowledge. In high school, students are asked to imbibe and later reproduce information in a learning process that amounts to little more than rote memorization. Furthermore, the onslaught of instant-access information means that anyone can supply facts on a wide range of subjects within seconds. Many careers that our students will pursue will therefore involve a set of skills that require them to do much more than locate existing information—they must have the ability to use existing knowledge and analytical thinking to produce new explanations and solutions to problems.

Our jobs as professors should therefore involve helping students to transition to being producers of knowledge. I guide students to develop an informed point of view on any given topic by being aware of existing arguments, being able to critique them, and being able to identify areas for improvement. I never impose a “correct” point of view on students, because the process of coming to reasoned conclusions is crucial to their ability to identify puzzles and design solutions. Instead, I challenge their views to force them to locate weaknesses to their arguments and to give thoughtful answers to critiques of their own views. For example, one student told me he is a committed realist and explained every case we studied as an exercise in major power politics. Over the course of the semester, I asked this student to explain instances of interstate cooperation or major powers choosing to pursue their interests via non-coercive means through the lens of realism. The goal was not to

change his mind, but to ensure that he had considered many facets of state behavior and was well-informed of counterarguments that he could respond to in a compelling manner.

My goal of pushing students to become producers of knowledge does not end at the semester's end. When I have a promising student, I approach them at the end of the semester and ask them more about their post-graduation plans. I often find that many students have an interest in doing *something* related to international affairs, but their plans are imprecise because they are not aware of what they can do with their degree. Some say that graduate school or going to work for an NGO sounds exciting, but they do not know how they can find out more about these options. I help them enrich their undergraduate careers by introducing them to faculty who share their research interests and are enthusiastic about working with students. For example, I taught a summer section of International Conflict and had two extremely bright students. When speaking with them, both told me that they had a strong desire to enter careers related to international politics, but they felt they had never had the opportunity to learn more about these careers and did not know how to approach faculty members to learn more. I found a faculty member for each of them to work with, and now both are volunteering as research assistants for these faculty and have a much better understanding of what a career in our field involves. Most important, these are students who have the potential to contribute to our knowledge of international politics, and they are now in a better position to do so. While the best I could do for these particular students was to connect them to appropriate faculty, I look forward to being someone that students can work with and benefit from as an assistant professor.

*Principle 3: Improve my teaching.*

I constantly reflect on lessons I taught to figure out how I can teach the concept better next time. In the first course I taught, Introduction to International Relations, I relied mostly on lectures. While the feedback I got on teaching evaluations was positive and indicated that I explained concepts clearly to them, I decided to try a different way of fostering learning in my next course. In my International Conflict course, I relied heavily on a discussion-based approach wherein I supervised discussions and allowed the students to explore concepts with each other. I kept the lessons centered on a given topic, but the students chose their exact path. Furthermore, I set aside time for everyone to workshop their research papers throughout the semester, allowing students to present their ideas and explain their logic and how they planned to test it, while everyone else offered feedback and assisted each other in developing their ideas. Everyone became a part of everyone else's learning throughout the course.

Incorporating experiential learning techniques into my courses has been another improvement. I assisted my dissertation advisor in running simulations on Crisis Diplomacy and revolutions (e.g., the French Revolution) which are designed to demonstrate to students the difficulty of balancing competing interests and working with allies to achieve their goals. Students are assigned roles and given a set of objectives to pursue, and these objectives overlap and conflict with other students' objectives to varying degrees. Through these simulations students learn the importance of concepts such as credibility, information, bargaining, cooperation, and coercion. In my courses I reserve 2-5 weeks of class time to include these simulations. I believe that incorporating multiple methods of learning is the most effective way to get students to retain what we teach them. It is one thing to teach students that open and honest communication between world leaders can prevent conflict, but when the students go to war in their simulations and later reflect that they perhaps could have avoided war if they had not been constantly deceiving each other, they understand first-hand how important this information concept is.