Teaching Reflections

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I have compiled here detailed descriptions of my experiences as an instructor. Each section discusses a different course, reviews selected experiences from that course along with student feedback, and provides my reflections for improving my teaching based on my experience.

Contents

1   Theories of Social Justice

I was the Assistant in Instruction for Frank Lovett's Theories of Social Justice course in Fall 2017. The goal of the course was for students to become conversant in five main theories related to social justice and to apply these theories in three exams and a final paper. I approached this course in a unique way because I had never taken a traditional political theory course in either undergraduate or graduate training. This meant that I was both responsible for grading and helping the fifty students in the class with the material while also learning the material myself. Through this process, I learned a lot about my ability to understand unfamiliar material and quickly transition to breaking down the concepts to assist students who were struggling.

Professor Lovett had the course syllabus, all assignments and exams, and extremely detailed lecture notes planned from previous iterations of the course. This preparation meant that I did not develop course materials. My main role was to evaluate student learning from exams and to help students craft their term papers.

1.1   Assisting Students After a Difficult Exam

I received the first exam and the scoring rubric on the day of the exam. I immediately noticed that there was a significant gap between the expectations for the exam outlined in class and the rigor upon which answers were to be evaluated. Indeed, student performance on the first exam was relatively poor. The exam asked students to define key terms from the course, but it also required students to make connections between these terms and other course topics. Students did well recalling concepts their authors, but failed to make the required connections.

After scoring the first exam, I felt that a proactive approach was necessary to address students failure to make connections between different concepts introduced in the lecture material. This approach consisted of:

1. Extensive feedback on exams. I helped students understand the connections between concepts they were expected to recall.

2. Instructor feedback. I briefed Professor Lovett on the exam results and my main concern: that lectures were not designed for students to naturally make connections between topics.

3. Whole class feedback. I communicated with the entire class to describe ways to organize learning (especially through concept maps) as well as to improve recall.

4. Individual feedback. I met with over half of the class individually to review their performance. I asked students how they prepared for the exam to determine common methods of studying. I then suggested new methods based on their particular strengths and weaknesses in understanding the material.

This intervention produced noticeable results from the first to the second exam. Student performance increased 10 points between exams, and the main area of student improvement was in demonstrating their knowledge of how concepts connect.

1.2 Crafting Student Term Papers

My second area of focus was on student term papers. I asked to assist in this role in order to give students the opportunity to have their work reviewed before it was evaluated. Fifteen students met with me individually and provided drafts or outlines of their essays.

A particularly common issue was that students tended to engage in summary instead of critically analyzing a topic using various theories of social justice. In talking with students, it became apparent that the cause of this issue was that students' topics were much too broad. Thus, I started student meetings by asking students to describe their topic and what connections they made between the topic and social justice theories. I used their interest to help them focus the paper on an increasingly narrow topic. This was an effective strategy because students could apply a single part of a theory of social justice and really explore how that theory worked or failed.

Professor Lovett graded the individual papers, and he remarked that the biggest problem was students who lacked focus in their essay and summarized too much. The students that I worked with scored, on average, a letter grade higher because their essays were on topic and focused.

1.3 Feedback

Student feedback reflects the disconnect students felt between Professor Lovett's lectures and the first exam, but it also reflects the impact that students felt the intervention had on their performance. I believe an area to improve in the future based on this feedback is to be more proactive in helping students even when I am not completely comfortable with the material.

- "I thought he was a very good TA. He's very friendly and always made it clear when he was available to speak to during office hours. Again, I felt the grading procedures for the course exam were a bit overly harsh, but everything was returned to us promptly."

- "He was very nice! Grading was super clear and helped me do better on next exam. Was available to talk and was great."

- "The first exam was a little wishy washy, but after the first exam William really helped us to understand specific expectations for future exams!!"

- "He was very helpful!"

- "I only really interacted with William during exams since I never really felt the need to seek help outside of class, but he seemed pleasant and his grading seemed fair."

1.4 What I Learned

I was nervous assisting with this course because of my lack of knowledge about political theory. Further, I initially felt like I did not have much influence over student learning because I was not lecturing and I had to grade using a strict rubric. I also was not able to be proactive before the first exam because I did not receive it in time. However, after the first exam, I realized that I could really help students improve learning by using the first exam as an example. I think that I was effective in this role, though I wish I had been more confident in my knowledge of political theory to involve myself in the teaching and evaluating process earlier.

2 Political Protest and Violence

I was Assistant in Instruction for Sunita Parikh's Political Protest and Violence course in Spring 2018. The course was previously capped at twenty students, but this time we had fifty students. Thus, my main challenge was effectively teaching protest theories and engaging students in the material when the class size more than doubled.

2.1 Activities and Lectures

Because violence collective action is one of my areas of study, I had a very active role in delivering course content. This took two forms. For many classes where we were teaching theories of collective action, I developed activities to try to communicate the theories more concretely. To illustrate the ability of small groups to form within larger ones, we strategically assigned students into large groups and asked them to choose a band to perform at an upcoming on-campus concert. Group assignment was based on where students were sitting, under the theory that friends sharing musical interests would sit next to each other and form small coalitions to advocate for their musical interests in the larger group. Once groups made their artist selections, we probed the students to see if they recognized the group assignment and how that impacted their group dynamics. From this activity, Professor Parikh became interested in incorporating activities into her teaching, and the class became much more interactive as a result.

I had the opportunity to teach classes, supervise group project work, and lead exam review sessions; this amounted to teaching approximately one third of the course. I tried to bring different teaching styles to each topic I taught. I started a class on Prospect Theory by replicating the original experiment that developed the theory with the students. Student evaluations of this class indicated that many students felt they understood the theory better after this simulation and the resulting explanation. Similarly for a class on group decision making, students formed groups secretly based on class year and made a collective decision that would only effect freshmen and sophomores. Students figured out for themselves the group assignment and reflected on how that influenced their decisions.

I employed a version of "think, pair, share" in a discussion about the media's role in generating anger. Students broke into groups and were given a newspaper article from the time and place of the assigned reading. We discussed media bias and how these biases can create anger together before groups analyzed bias in their own articles. I strategically paired groups with similar articles together and asked them to determine how the articles differed. For example, one pair of articles contained reports about the same event from two different perspectives while another pair were the same article from a wire service with just a few words altered.

A major focus of my teaching was to try to connect theories of protest with students' experiences. Unionization efforts are currently underway at WashU, so I used that opportunity for the class to study how protest groups develop messages to communicate and the purposes of these messages.

2.2 Assessments

My other main roles were to prepare students for an exam, supervise an individual research paper, and to develop and implement a group project that could work with a class of fifty students. I relied on techniques from the Theories of Social Justice class to help students with the individual paper. Because I had control over the exam content and timing in this course, I held extensive review sessions before the exam date. I reviewed both concepts and strategies for the exam at these review sessions.

Collective action is prevalent, but most observers of collective action events only see them from one perspective. The goal of the group project was to change this and help students view a collective action event of their choice from many different angles. I chose to ask groups to conduct an in-class simulation of a group making decisions about a collective action event. It soon became clear that most students had never done this type of activity before. To structure their inquiry further, I decided to hold mandatory group meetings during class to approve parts of the project. Students seemed to get more on track after these meetings. Quality for the projects and accompanying outlines varied a bit. All of the topics were interesting and engaging, but some groups really deeply analyzed the theories they were using in their simulations while other groups did only surface level analysis. Providing additional guidance on the minimum requirements for the written outline part of the project may help increase the relevance of the project to theories students have already learned and help structure their learning more.

2.3 Feedback

I will focus on the end-of-course feedback here, since I mentioned some of the within course feedback earlier. Below, I present all personalized feedback I received in my course evaluations as well as selected feedback from Professor Parikh's course evaluations relevant to the discussion.

Classroom Time: One student commented that lectures were occasionally difficult to follow. Other comments were positive. A strategy the critical student alluded to is for me to better wrap-up each block of course material in a given class. My model was to switch teaching techniques every fifteen or twenty minutes, which I think was helpful, but it could be improved by adding in a wrap-up activity like a minute write, a concluding pause or question, or a quick paired group discussion to solidify the concept and remind students of the main take-away from that block of material. I always tried to start and end class by structuring the class time and describing the main points, but doing this within a block will increase clarity.

Professor Parikh observed during class that student's failing to read the assigned material hurt my ability to initiate active and engaging discussions. Because we each have different teaching styles, I alerted students to when I would be teaching, hoping that more of them would be ready to discuss the material, but the improvement was only marginal. Going forward, we agreed that reading journals that ask students to think about discussion questions

ahead of time will help structure student engagement during discussions and allow us to reduce our talking time.

- "He had interesting lectures that he clearly know the information for and was really engaged in the class. He was always helpful when asked questions and was willing to talk about his own experiences with collective action, which was really nice. He's definitely one of the best AIs I've ever had."

- "He was an awesome AI! His lectures were well structured, and it was easy to take notes. The activities in class he led were helpful for applying concepts we were learning about as well as engaging... He made the material we were learning about interesting, and I appreciated the effort he put into helping students."

- "Your lectures were occasionally difficult to follow as you tended to jump back and forth between ideas. Work on fleshing out an idea entirely before moving on to another presentation. Professor Parikh did this too but she was better at recognizing what she did and effectively bringing things together at the end of a tangent. Other than that you did an excellent job. Best of luck in your future!"

- "William has been incredibly helpful and dedicated to the class. I was super impressed with how much he knew about the material, but also how invested he was in teaching it."

- "...remarkably good at lecturing given his age/experience. Clearly very smart and capable."

Exam: I believe that the terms exam was successful. Though some students believed that they should know more about the exam expectations ahead of time, I did explain in detail the exam scoring rubric before the exam took place. Putting this information in the syllabus could help students who were not taking notes during that part of class or chose not to attend the review sessions.

- "More clearly communicating expectations for the one exam during class and outside of the one study session would have been very helpful."

- "William was extremely helpful and responsive for both exam reviews and group projects."

- "Expectations were very clear for what material was going to be on the exam."

Group Project: Clearly, the group project worked for some students and not for others. Some students were frustrated by the deliberate lack of structure we imposed on the project, while others found it to be the best part of the class. The group project certainly appealed to a different set of students than did the exam or paper. Many students remarked that this was the first time they had done a group project in college, so the experience was rather unfamiliar.

I believe group projects are important ways to solidify learning and to demonstrate knowledge at a higher level. A part of higher level thinking is extending models learned in class

beyond the cases covered in class, and the last comment shows that at least one student struggled with that.

I can do a better job explaining the purpose of the project and how students should approach it. I was surprised at their lack of familiarity with group projects, so I believe that many students may not have taken full advantage of the project or understood exactly what they learned as a result of it. Adding structure such that components of the project are due throughout the semester will help.

- "William was extremely helpful and responsive for both exam reviews and group projects."

- "The instructions for the group project could have been more clear. There were so many components that it got super chaotic."

- Describe one thing that helped you learn: "group project."

- "The opportunity to present a collective action event and apply theorist's ideas to the event helped solidify class concepts."

- "Increasing relevancy between course material and the group project."

Individual Meetings: My strategy for working with students on the final paper and during individual meetings seems to have been successful in this course. I believe structuring paper feedback by scaffolding will help those students with a tendency to start large assignments close to their due date think about them earlier. It will also provide students with opportunities to revise their work based on my feedback multiple times instead of just once.

- "William was a great TA and was readily available for answering questions and such outside of class hours."

- "He encouraged students to seek out his office hours for extra help. I attended his office hours and he provided constructive advice for the final paper and project."

- I consulted with him about my final paper and he gave me very thorough and thoughtful feedback, which I greatly appreciate.

- "William was a great TA. Very available via email and office hours, willing to provide helpful feedback on assignments..."

General:

- "He's so nice! We all love William."

- "He seemed very nice and approachable."

- "Very very helpful"

- "Very approachable and helpful."

- "The TA was really helpful, accessible, and knowledgeable."

- "Accessible TA and accessible professor. Very clear expectations as well."

- "William (the TA) was amazing and extremely helpful. Very willing to meet with students and responds to emails very quickly."

2.4   What I Learned

I received a substantial amount of feedback from students about what was and was not working well during at at the end of the course, both written and verbal. There are a number of structural changes Professor Parikh and I discussed implementing in a future class together in order to improve the course. These strategies included: scaffolding the final paper and group project, instituting reading journals, and using pre- and post-semester evaluations of student knowledge. In terms of my own preparation, students really liked my attempts to engage them in class and my help out of class. Few students reported being confused at classroom activities, though I should spend more time explaining why each activity is important before we start. My biggest goal is to increase closure between within class blocks and to use this structure, along with the reading journals, to increase discussion and encourage more students to participate.

3   Immigration, Identity, and the Internet

I was Assistant in Instruction for Sunita Parikh's Immigration, Identity, and the Internet course in Fall 2018. This was a writing-intensive course that was capped at twenty-two students.

Professor Parikh expressed to me that she wanted to completely re-design this course to more heavily emphasize different types of writing. Writing-intensive courses are upper-level seminars focused on writing, but they have flexibility in both the frequency and cohesiveness of writing assignments. Based on feedback from our Political Protest and Violence course, we agreed that both short, frequent writing assignments and a longer, cohesive writing project were necessary to prepare students for their careers.

3.1   Course Focus and Syllabus

I added a substantial number of readings to the syllabus, both to update older material and to focus the second half of the class on contemporary debates about immigration, identity, and the internet. I added new material on identity and theories of identity construction to the first part of the course. I also tried to broaden the applicability of the material by comparing and contrasting different kinds of identity and questioning identity altogether in the final days of the course. Finally, I devoted several weeks to radicalization on the Internet: a contemporary topic that I used to tie together previous theories and foundational pieces.

I also introduced a community engagement and long-term group collaboration component into the syllabus. Students were assigned to groups to conduct a debate about translation services for Bosnian immigrants in St. Louis. This project involved getting out into the community and interviewing St. Louis residents, connecting issues from class to local contexts, and thinking about issues from various perspectives. Groups produced flyers and mock newspapers in preparation for the debate, and individuals wrote opening statements both for and against the debate question. On the day of the debate, groups were randomly assigned to work together to articulate one side of the issue and come to an agreement with the other side about the best policy that satisfied everyone's requirements.

Students enjoyed the change of pace and the time we allowed them to work together as a group in class. The assignment definitely fostered group and class camaraderie. There were sufficient introductory materials in class readings to make the debate fit into the flow of the course. In the future, a more extensive debrief — perhaps dedicating a full day to talking about the debate instead of a few minutes — would help make connections between this experience and the themes of the course more clear.

3.2   Reading Journals

Reading Journals are designed to ensure that students engage with the reading ahead of time and are prepared for class discussion. These two-page assignments also help students

learn to write coherent and effective pieces in a short period of time. We asked students to summarize readings, provide a short reaction and ask a question about the readings, and to think about a discussion question that synthesized what was read. Students were given flexibility to devote more or less space to each component based on their interests. The discussion question provided a known and predictable starting point for each class and ensured that even generally quiet students or those who struggle to think on their feet during a discussion could jump in and participate.

I evaluated six Reading Journals throughout the semester, providing a several paragraph response. We also skimmed Reading Journals before class to help us organize and respond to common concerns and questions. Students did not know the day they were to be evaluated in advance; this ensured that they completed all the Reading Journals even though we did not evaluate all of them. Some students found this more stressful than intended, so we allowed one "free zero" based on mid-semester feedback so that if a Reading Journal was not turned in, but the student was selected for grading, the student would be graded on a different day with no penalty.

The Reading Journals and the amount of reading in general were the most contentious features of the class. Many students recognized how the Reading Journals helped them prepare for class and kept them accountable. Some said that they were overwhelmed by the Reading Journals and the amount of reading, though we did stress strategies for reading and completing the journals in an efficient manner. Ultimately, most students reported that the course workload was heavy, but also that half of the students spent between 1 and 5 hours on coursework per week while the other half spent between 6 and 10. This fits in the recommended guideline of about 3 hours of out-of-class work to 1 hour of instruction time.

In the future, I plan on spending part of an early class discussing how to read and notate articles and write reading responses. This should help students realize when they are spending too much time on the Reading Journals. Also, I plan to develop a new system to reward students for turning in all (or almost all) of the Reading Journals.

Feedback:

- "It IS a writing intensive class so there are a lot of reading journals due that you need to keep on top of."

- "The work load is quite substantial with the two page required responses so just make sure you plan accordingly because they creep up on you and take longer than expected."

- "I think requiring reading journals definitely makes sure people do the readings for each class and helped me learn more about the topics. However, instead of having to do two every week it might have been more manageable if we all had one day a week that we had to do…"

- "Did lots of readings and reading journals which helped you actually digest what you were reading."

- "The Reading Journals were helpful in that they forced me to summarize the readings before class and pick out the points I thought were the most interesting." "The reading

journals were an effective way of keeping up with the material."

- "Because the readings were implicitly mandatory, I learned a lot through this and was able to explore topics at depths and find what resonated with me."

3.3   Research Paper

The original design of this course called for two literature review papers and a final paper. These longer pieces of writing were not connected to each other in any meaningful way. The literature review paper was designed to be a familiar way to introduce our writing expectations for the course. Literature reviews focused on the most theoretical material: theories of immigration, identity, and assimilation.

I changed the second literature review paper to a paper where students were asked to articulate a theoretical argument and a falsifiable hypothesis. I expected that students would not have experience writing a novel theory, so we built in time in the syllabus to discuss the theory paper further in class. We stressed to students that we designed the theory paper assignment to build on the literature review; students who conducted a literature review on an immigration topic were encouraged to write a theory about how the introduction of the Internet may have changed the findings articulated in their literature review. About half of the class structured their theory paper in this manner. I thought this was successful, as it helped students make connections between different parts of the class while not forcing them into a topic they did not like.

In addition, both the literature review and theory papers had dedicated meeting times where students met with either one of us to receive detailed feedback on draft papers. I provided feedback on writing composition, including sentence construction, grammar, and style. My major focus was the content of the paper and the clarity of writing. For each draft, I both wrote margin comments and a several paragraph discussion of the paper as a whole with clear instructions for revisions. Students' were expected to incorporate our feedback into their final drafts. I graded those students who met with me for the literature review paper and Sunita did the same to eliminate the possibility of one of us marking off a change the student made to respond to the other. While we graded from the same rubric and also read and discussed each others papers, we recognized that our grading systems may be slightly different (as noted by a student's comment). For this exact reason, students who I evaluated for the literature review paper had Sunita for the theory paper and vice versa.

We also asked students to conduct their own peer reviews of each others' literature review and theory papers. We dedicated substantial class time to discussing the peer review process and providing guidance on successful peer reviews. We decided to give students freedom to conduct their peer reviews and exchange them without our intervention; this strategy was successful as all students completed both peer reviews on time.

The final research paper was a twelve to fifteen page narrative about an immigrant's journey. The prompt was intentionally vague in order to give students maximum flexibility to address it in the way they chose. Formats ranged from a screenplay, to an immigration

asylum legal argument, to a remake of a book, to a series of interviews with relatives. Some students liked this flexibility and others thought that it did not give them clear enough guidance. For example, our rubrics defined expectations for papers at each letter grade, but grades within letter grades were based on how well the criteria were met — an inherently subjective task. To help provide structure, we asked students to complete a series of questions about their paper and to turn them in as an outline. We provided written feedback on the outline and gave students a non-mandatory opportunity to meet to discuss. Nearly all students took this opportunity.

We hoped that the final paper could illustrate the literature and theoretical arguments made in the previous papers, essentially making it a case study for the students' theories. These connections to the theory and literature review were part of the rubric for the final paper; this gave students a second opportunity to practice implementing what they had learned. Students who were uncomfortable with the initial literature review and theory papers expressed that they "knew what they were doing" in the final paper.

Along with the paper, we asked students to create a research log — essentially an annotated bibliography — listing all the sources they used to construct their paper and to write a reflection about the research process. We encouraged students to be creative in their final paper structure. As a result, connections to theory and the literature may not have been as clear as some students would have liked. The reflection provided space for them to discuss their writing process and what they meant by certain sections of their papers. Many students said that they felt reassured by the inclusion of this requirement.

In general, students expressed that they really enjoyed the final paper and that they appreciated how everything tied together. The entire process exposed them to different kinds of academic writing, which many students thought was very helpful. Additionally, students really appreciated the draft and review process. The biggest challenge was actually one I did not expect: students had never written a literature review. Since the class consisted of juniors and seniors, I expected that everyone was familiar with literature reviews and students said they were comfortable with them before the draft literature review was due. However, the drafts were not what the rubrics required and some students privately told me that this was the first literature review they had ever written. To remedy this, we spent most of a class after the draft literature reviews were due discussing how to construct a proper literature review and walking students through examples. Final literature reviews were much improved, but in the future it will be important to devote more time to the literature review regardless of the familiarity that students express.

Feedback:

- "This truly is a writing intensive course but the feedback given will really help you improve your writing."

- "It's a lot of writing, but take your time with the assignments, you'll learn a lot from them."

- "Allowing us to go through a draft phase with our papers and having one on one meetings with either Sunita or William helped me in the writing process, especially

because I haven't had to write consistently for a class since Writing 1."

3.4   Course Instruction

I was the primary instructor for half of the class sessions spread throughout the course. Sunita and I wanted the course to foster a collaborative atmosphere, so team teaching was the preferred method. Thus, I was still actively engaged and participating in the half of the class sessions during which I was not the primary instructor.

I leveraged the team teaching environment to focus on small group activities and alternative teaching methods during my half of the class sessions. For example, if Sunita had conducted a professor-led discussion the class previously, I complimented this with group work and technology use. My goal was to move past a student-led summary of the reading and introduction of the discussion question in the first ten or fifteen minutes of the class session. The rest of the class typically consisted of student-led discussion about the discussion question, a small group activity that led to a larger group discussion, and several "attention reset" activities between these two components.

Feedback:

- "The professors are amazing." "Professor Parikh and William are both incredibly well informed on the issues." "Professor Parikh and William are both really passionate and knowledgeable about the subjects being taught."

- "Great course, loved the prof, interesting papers and discussions." "It is a very well-taught and interesting course."

- "I very much enjoyed this course and would recommend it to other students. It is a writing intensive course so the workload is a bit heavy, but the readings are interesting. The class is very much discussion based which I enjoyed."

- "Fascinating class if you are remotely interested in immigration, identity or the internet. Not like other more traditional writing intensive classes (e.g. Argumentation or Exposition) but engaging and provides you with a lot of information."

- "If you are interested in immigration, this class is incredibly interesting. It's cool to hear about what your other classmates have to say about the discussed topics."

- "The class is definitely discussion based and hearing different ideas and experiences based off of the readings has been interesting. Most of the learning is audio (because discussion)...."

- "Writing heavy, but interesting material."

- "The group activities weren't worthwhile." "Maybe more group projects?"

- "The interactive aspects of the course and small group feel [were my favorite part]."

- "Teachers also actively sought out feedback from students both at the beginning of the semester and in the middle and were always willing to meet for appointments."

- "A clearer grading standard for assignments would also be helpful." "The professor explained everything clearly and thoroughly."

- "I feel like lectures could have been more substantiated with use of more technology and notes. Teachers utilized a wide ranging of teaching styles to ensure students were engaged (presentation, group project, essays, discussions, peer review)."

- "Since the class was discussionbased, it was really useful to hear other peoples' interpretations of the readings, and that helped me learn."

- "The conversational style of class allowed me to feel very comfortable talking to the professors."

- "The readings are all very interesting and intellectually stimulating."

- "My favorite part has been the interactive activities that we do in class - they really help to engage me and bring to life the concepts we've been learning about."[1]

- "I particularly enjoy having readings assigned each class period that reflect on the same topic but take on differing perspectives." "My least favorite part has been how theoretical a lot of our readings and discussions have been."

- "My favorite part of the course so far has been the connections we make during in-class discussions. For example, I genuinely enjoyed the food connection as well as the global sports connection. I now see these as part of a greater web that involves immigration, communication and cosmopolitanism which is very new but exciting."

- "My favorite part of the course so far is the flexibility in writing assignments from the reading journals to the lit review (and the final research paper which sounds like so much fun)."

3.5   What I Learned

Teaching a writing-intensive course of this type was rather difficult; we were fortunate enough to receive a substantial amount of feedback from students during before, during, and after course evaluations. It was particularly challenging to encourage students to put forth the substantial effort we expected for this class while also making sure that it was clear how all the components of the class fit and made it worth the effort. Although I incorporated many of the changes that I thought might work from previous courses, none of them were completely successful. In the future, I hope to spend more time in class further explaining the rationale behind each assignment.

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[1]Here and below from mid-term evaluations.

4 Introduction to Comparative Politics

I was Assistant in Instruction for Guillermo Rosas' Introduction to Comparative Politics course in Spring 2019. This course has an enrollment of 90 students and took the form of two lectures and one discussion section per week. My main contribution was mentoring the ten undergraduate teaching assistants (UTA) who taught the discussion sections.

This course had previously been taught in a three day a week lecture format with no discussion section. In changing to the new format, I suggested to Guillermo that we provide ample structure for the UTAs so that they would have the tools to succeed in leading their section. I thought that this would be a great opportunity to both design lesson plans for the UTAs and to mentor them through the teaching process.

4.1 Designing Lesson Plans

Other courses in the department use the discussion section format, and what I have observed is that there is little structure provided to the UTAs asked to teach the sections. They are either on their own to develop their own lesson plans or simply ask whether students have questions about the material. Since the students in the class are mostly freshmen and the other two class periods are lectures, questions rarely span the entirety of available material.

In coordination with Guillermo, I would look ahead to the next week's lecture slides and think about broad topics that could be engaging to discuss during the sections. I had two primary goals: to help students practice applying concepts defined in the lecture and to make deeper connections between the lecture material and practical applications of political science.

The structure and format of the lesson plans varied greatly throughout the semester. In general, I blocked the 50 minute classes into three activities with time for class announcements and administration at the beginning of the class and review at the end. One of these activities was devoted to review of lecture concepts; I generally developed application based problems that students worked in small groups to solve. A second activity related to popular media. Students either read an article before class and engaged in a class discussion or watched a video and reacted to some viewing questions. In the third activity, I tried to link the concepts from the week to other classes or to each other so that students saw how what they were learning fit within the broader world of politics.

When writing the lesson plans, I balanced clear-cut activities with flexibility on the part of the UTA. I wanted all students to be exposed to the same basic material in section, but each UTA's class was different and responded to different teaching strategies. Toward that end, I also included a substantial amount of optional material in each lesson plan for use if the UTA's class got through the activities early or if the UTA wanted the flexibility to integrate some of the activities together.

4.2   Mentoring

Only one of the ten UTAs had previous teaching experience, and all but two were sophomores who had taken this class the year prior. This meant that UTAs were unfamiliar with teaching techniques and were nervous about their ability to do well. During our weekly team meetings, I was in charge of getting the UTAs ready to teach the next week's lesson plan. This consisted of reviewing what they did the week prior, asking for feedback on how different activities went and seeking out areas the UTAs found difficult.

Following this review, I walked everyone through the upcoming lesson plan. I had two goals: making sure UTAs were confident and comfortable with the content in the lesson plan and providing strategies that would help them teach the content effectively. The lesson plan itself encapsulated these goals: I described in detail the exercises and activities for each class including possible solutions or answers or discussion questions. Additionally, I provided written guidance regarding areas where students might be confused and tips to help the UTAs teach more effectively.

4.3   Instruction and Assessment

I instructed one class when Guillermo was out-of-town. The class used a number of small group activities and made connections between the material (plurality electoral systems) and contexts the students might find more familiar (local city elections). This was a big change from the traditional lecture-style format of the rest of the course. Some students came up to me after the class and said that they found it the most engaging and relevant lecture they had experienced during the semester. Other students quite rightfully found the experience a bit jarring; I outlined my approach to the class in my introduction, but discomfort resulting from the change in style was warranted. It usually takes more than one class period to get students on-board with small group activities and discussions, especially in a large class.

I took the lead on developing both formative and summative assessments. This consisted of three exams and nine homework sets. Guillermo dictated the format and style of these assessments; I provided advice to students about study techniques particularly geared to these types of assessments.

4.4   What I Learned

Designing lesson plans for others to teach and then mentoring them through teaching it relied on an interesting combination of skills. Feedback from the UTAs on the lesson plans, the way they were written, and the advice I provided on teaching both in the lesson plan and in person was very positive. UTAs consistently indicated that they felt prepared to teach their sections and reported that their sections had gone well. Both the UTAs and Guillermo indicated that the lesson plans were well done and that the teaching strategies I presented were helpful guides for teaching the section. Additionally, I was pleased to see that many

UTAs took the suggestions I provided for ways to personalize their section lesson plans and used this to create lessons tailored to their own personality and their students.

I realized that this "behind the scenes" role was quite important to the overall functioning of the course. In the future, I would like to implement a teaching crash course for the UTAs before the semester starts. I was pleased to see how much initiative many of them took to deliver high quality lessons, but more familiarity with the techniques I was asking them to perform in the classroom could have increased their comfort in teaching earlier in the semester.

5 Introduction to Comparative Politics

I was the sole instructor for an Introduction to Comparative Politics course in Summer 2019. Nine students enrolled in this course. This course was structured around teaching students to write a political science research article in addition to discussing typical course content. I evaluated the effectiveness of this course structure in a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning project.

5.1 Course Structure

This course had two main learning goals: introducing students to work in comparative politics and empowering them to get involved in the political science research process. The first goal is quite different from simply learning about different systems of government. Indeed, I wanted students to get engaged in the discipline and to learn how political scientists do research. Should students continue in the major, they will need to read, react, and produce research and engaging students with research is an excellent way to excite them about the discipline. Students come to comparative politics with almost no existing knowledge, and instructors have a limited opportunity to introduce them to the subject and excite them about a topic that may not have been on their radar. What better way to do so than to help them investigate their passions, situate them in existing research, and help students learn how to evaluate proposed policy solutions.

A course with these overarching objectives called for a complete re-design of the typical comparative politics syllabus. For one, the entire course needed to be structured around teaching students how to engage with and produce political science research. Each journal article we read needed to further both a substantive and a methodological goal. Methodological goals also needed to be topical: if students were writing theoretical arguments in their own research projects, then the articles we read needed to have strong theories so that students could study those arguments in class and create similar ones of their own.

Substantively, the course was arranged in three parts: building or justifying the need for a state, examining the variation in institutions within a state, and engaging how citizens interact with the state. The third part of the course was particularly important in my mind

because much of the thrust of the course was policy oriented. In order to empower students to produce their own research, students needed to work through the policy development process and see ways in which they could influence policy. As a result, we limited the time spent discussing institutional typologies. We did cover conventional topics like types of legislatures and governments, but we used these typologies as a starting point for broader discussions about the role of institutions in shaping political behavior instead of focusing on institutional features for their own sake.

The goal of helping students produce political science research drove most of the rest of the structural decisions about the course. Students were primarily assessed based on their submissions of parts of a research article that they successfully completed by the end of the semester. These components included: a research question; an annotated bibliography and literature review; a theory section; a research design; and an introduction, abstract, and conclusion to the whole article. Students had the option to write a hypothetical results section, but, as this was not a research methods class, students did not carry out the empirical analysis. This course was the first time the overwhelming majority of students had been exposed to political science and the first time anyone had attempted to conduct political science research. It was therefore critically important to devote at least half of every class session to working on activities related to different parts of the research article.

Additionally, once students turned in each part of their research article, we spent a full class day recapping what students learned about the part they turned in and preparing for the next part of the article. These "Methods Workshops" tied all of the article writing material we worked on in individual classes together and provided students with an opportunity to learn about each other's work. Since there were no exams in the course, peer reviews and discussions with other students about their research partially served to reinforce and synthesize course content.

There was no textbook required for this course because one objective was to help students learn how to read research articles and analyze them. As a result, the research articles selected had to cover basic substantive topics in the text in order to provide students with enough information for them to understand the theoretical arguments and empirical results. Articles that balance detailed descriptions of concepts are difficult to come by; I intentionally favored articles that did a good job of explaining such concepts over articles published in top outlets that lacked this explanation. The substantive content in the first and last third of the course lent itself well to this format and required time in class introducing fundamental concepts. The middle third of the class was focused on institutions, and few articles adequately describe institutional typologies well enough that class time can be completely devoted to discussion. Additionally, this middle third required the most methodological explanation. Group activities about regression analysis are only helpful once students all understand basic principles. As a result, some students observed that class sessions ranged widely in instructional format due to these challenges. In the future, it would be good to more clearly outline this pattern upfront so that students would know to expect it.

5.2 Assessment

Almost fifty percent of students' grades were based on different parts of their research article. After turning in each component of their article, students conducted peer reviews and received instructor feedback. Students could rewrite their literature review and theory sections and turn them in for regrading if they wanted to improve their score. Regardless of whether students exercised this option, each subsequent component of the article required students to revise previous components so that they built their full article throughout the semester. Students also received credit for their participation in the peer review process. The compacted schedule of the semester made it difficult for students to work through the entire article process, but students consistently reported that the process taught them a lot.

As a compliment to the research article, students translated their article into a policy proposal and articulated that proposal in a policy briefing paper. The purpose of the briefing paper was to help students see that their research could have a meaningful impact on policy and to think about the importance of policy-based research more carefully. This component was also designed to motivate students and to help them think about political science in a different way.

To reinforce concepts students learned while reading assigned articles, I asked students to complete two page Reading Journals. Journals included a short summary, a short reflection, space for a question, and a page responding to a reading question that formed the basis for the ensuing class session. Journal entries were a step-up in quality from the previous time I used them; this was likely due to the template I provided and the time we spent discussing how to read a journal article in class.

Because the course lacked traditional exams, I developed several ways to measure formative and summative knowledge. Reading journals provided an initial assessment of formative knowledge, and I supplemented these journals with frequent tickets in or out. As a way to help students synthesize material throughout the course, I asked students to engage in concept mapping both individually and in small groups. Initial concept maps were meant to simply link different typologies and topics we covered on each class day together. The final concept mapping exercise of the semester asked students to work in small groups to place each other's research questions into the concept map and to engage these questions with the topics we studied throughout the semester. In general, the concept mapping activity was successful, but I would also like to develop another summative assessment technique to use once or twice throughout the semester that is an alternative to concept mapping for students who are not visual learners.

5.3 Instruction

Instructional time in the course was split between a limited amount of traditional lecturing, small and large group work, discussion, and other activities. Due to the course structure, each class session consisted of some time devoted to both substantive and methods topics. The amount of time varied considerably depending on the topic. More time was needed

to introduce regression analysis, for example, then was needed to review basic principles of selecting control variables. I tried to be upfront about how each class was structured and why we were learning in certain ways. Students were asked to complete beginning of semester surveys that listed their preferred teaching techniques. Unsurprisingly, some student's favorite technique was another student's least favorite technique.

I broke classes into fifteen to twenty minute blocks and used a different instructional technique during each block. A typical class consisted of a five minute introduction, a small group activity, a short video followed by reflective writing, a large group discussion, and another small group activity about a methods topic. Short videos or references to student submitted news articles provided a way to keep the course relevant to ongoing events in comparative politics. On the whole, the class was relatively quiet, so reflective time was helpful in spurring group discussion. Some students preferred visual lecture presentations; the middle third of the class featured more of these presentations than did other classes. For those who really felt that group discussion was the best, I set aside an entire class to a student led circle discussion. Most classes adopted neither of these extremes, but tried to mix modes of instruction together so that each student would be engaged during each class.

Small group activities took on various forms to match the goals for the activity. Several activities were focused on working with data or data analysis, helping students apply the concepts from the readings to new problems. Students frequently worked together to replicate or extend parts of the analysis presented in published work. For example, student groups worked together to develop alternative measures for civil conflict and to see how well those measures mapped on to existing work. Groups also served as a forum for debate; students spent time reflecting on an issue and picking a side, like members were placed in groups, and these groups were asked to develop arguments supporting the opposing point of view.

A major small and large group simulation took place on Policy Day. Students got into groups several classes before Policy Day and attempted to synthesize their policy recommendations based on their research article. On Policy Day, the class voted on a country in which they would be legislators. Given that country context, students worked quickly in their small groups to develop a policy proposal tailored to that country and related to each member in the group's research article. After presenting their work, students from different groups paired up and tried to negotiate a piece of legislation that preserved their policy interests and that others would vote for. The class voted on the proposals and groups re-formed to figure out the timeline for implementation, the budget, and how policy success could be measured. The Policy Day simulation connected students' research articles to substantive policy proposals and also taught them the difficulties of negotiating with legislators who are advocating for different policies.

5.4   Mentoring

Students in this course ranged from high school seniors to college seniors with majors from neuroscience to finance to psychology. The course was the vast majority of students' first experience with political science. Mentoring, therefore, was an extremely important aspect

of the course both to provide students specific verbal feedback on their research articles and to help students adjust to social science coursework. I met with each student in the class individually at the very beginning of the semester to provide targeted feedback on their research questions and to get to know them better. Following these meetings, I met with most students two or three additional times. One student needed help adjusting to reading social science research. Another student had a research topic that brought in international relations content that was not part of the course. Accessibility and a positive classroom climate were key to developing relationships with students so that they felt comfortable asking for help. After students reported struggling with their literature reviews, I walked the class through the time it took and the number of revisions I made to a recent article I had published. This is just one way that I tried to treat students as political scientists and to help them understand that the challenges they faced in the class are common. The fact that they moved through the research article writing process so quickly was a testament to individual dedication and students' relying on each other and me for assistance.

5.5   What I Learned

Students did write a research article successfully in this class. It was a difficult process for most students, but their end products were quite good and were comparable to senior capstone paper submissions. I found this format more difficult to teach than a course that relied on exams for assessments; the increased difficulty for both the students and for me were more than compensated by the progress students made in understanding and engaging with political science research.

One major improvement I would make is to the first two classes of the semester. I tried during these classes to explain the reasoning behind the way the course was formatted and to demonstrate different teaching techniques used throughout the course, but I did not successfully give students a big picture view of the research article writing process as much as I did of the substantive focus of comparative politics. The lack of this view and previewing some of the points along the way that might be particularly challenging left some students feeling frustrated after the literature review was due even though they did a fine job on the actual assignment.

During this introductory time, it would also be helpful to practice having discussions. Students were really excited to have discussions in the course; they devoted a large part of their community contract to thinking of ways to create a good environment for discussions. Though students then reported that discussions were one of the most valuable parts of the course, I feel that a "discussion about discussions" might help the class consistently have higher-quality discussions throughout the semester.

Prompt and detailed feedback was key in the course. Since this class met every day, this meant grading research article assignments and reading journals on the night they were turned in. Students reported that this was absolutely key for them to have enough time to complete ensuing assignments. Due to the rapid deadlines for assignments, some time that could have been spent editing parts of the article or more deeply reflecting on peer and

instructor feedback was lost. My current approach is to review giving and receiving feedback briefly and to take revisions based on feedback into account in assignment grades. I can do a more effective job teaching students how to work with feedback so that the revisions they make are not just surface level.

Along with prompt feedback, students had the opportunity to rewrite their literature review and theory paper if they so chose for a re-grade. This re-grade came with no penalty; the idea was for students that really struggled with the initial assignment to have a second chance to work on it after receiving written feedback. One student did take advantage of the re-grade policy in this way. She worked very hard on the initial assignment, but because of a language barrier, some of her thoughts were not clearly communicated. Rewriting allowed her to address major issues that I identified in her previous version. However, two students took advantage of the policy and turned in incomplete drafts for their first submission and then revised for their re-graded submission. In the future, the re-grading can come with a grade penalty to encourage students to do their absolute best work on the initial submission and not to rely on a re-grade.