



TEACHING POLITICAL
SCIENCE SERIES No 1.

How to Teach Political Science?

The Experience of First-time University Teachers

Edited by
Gabriela Gregušová

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Gabriela Gregušová
Comenius University, Bratislava

2005

This publication results from work undertaken in the framework of the POLIS EPISTEME programme, which is supported by the European Commission. The POLIS EPISTEME Thematic Network – Enhancing Political Science Teaching Quality and Mobility in Europe – was conceived to help consolidate the European academic community of political scientists. It also aims to facilitate the adaptation of the discipline to the rapidly changing international and European higher education landscape. For more information about this project, please refer to: www.polis.uniroma2.it.

This publication is also part of an epsNet publication series. The European Political Science Network (epsNet), launched in June 2001 in Paris, has been one of the major achievements of the EU-sponsored European Thematic Network in Political Science (1997 – 2001) and is a partner in the POLIS project. It has been joined by political scientists from Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Its major objectives are to foster cooperation in the field of teaching political science in Europe and to contribute to the advancement of the discipline on a European level. Its website is: www.epsnet.org.

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Published jointly by epsNet, University of Rome Tor Vergata and Sciences Po Paris

POLIS EPISTEME
European Office
Università degli Studi di Roma
"Tor Vergata"
Via Orazio Raimondo, 18
00173 Rome, Italy
Tel.: + 39 06 72 59 2757
Fax: + 39 06 72 59 3618
www.polis.uniroma2.it
www.eu.uniroma2.it

European Political Sciences
Network
General Secretariat
Central European University
Nádor u. 9.
1051 Budapest, Hungary
Tel.: +36 (1) 327-3000/2842,
Fax: + 36 (1) 235-6168
www.epsnet.org

European Political Sciences
Network
Registered office
Sciences Po Paris (FNPS)
27, rue Saint-Guillaume
75007 Paris, France
Tel.: + 33 1 45 49 59 44
Fax: + 33 1 45 49 59 45
www.epsnet.org

ISSN 1815-2457
ISBN 963 218 399 1

Printed by Sciences Po Paris, France

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Preface

Teaching and research should go together. This principle, however, has been violated for a long time. There is an increasing tendency to weigh the quality of research higher than the quality of teaching. This is true both in the political science profession and in education policy. Of course, political scientists should be in a position to do cutting edge research. However, they should be equally well equipped to be good teachers.

Teaching is not an easy task. It needs authority and empathy. Authority is based on competence. Thus, a good teacher must master the chosen field of expertise. Empathy means the ability to look at the world with the eyes of the other. Thus, a good teacher must be sensitive to students' problems – help them to ask questions, familiarize them with the proper methods, show them how to analyze and discuss results and – most importantly - motivate students to drill hard wood – that is to pursue their subject in depth.

While authority and empathy are characteristics of “good” teachers young and old, the young ones in particular are faced with the problem of how to learn “good” teaching. In some countries didactics of politics is offered at universities and it might certainly be of help to attend such courses. However, many young colleagues tend to ignore didactics because it does not pay in terms of professional reputation, which is mostly linked to good research. An article in a refereed journal simply carries more weight. To change this attitude the reward system has to change. Only if good teaching pays in terms of status and reputation as well as research will the proper balance be restored.

There is, however, with or without change in the incentive structure, the moment when young teachers face a class of students for the first time. Being well prepared is self-evident, but how does one attract the students' interest in what is being taught? In my own case I profited from the clear

hierarchy and mutual obligations of the old-fashioned German university system. As an assistant I had to accompany “my” professor to his lectures and seminars and was supposed to “assist” in his various teaching activities. In a way I was an apprentice, but by the time I met my first class of students I had definitely learned how to teach them. The “apprenticeship model” has disappeared and today young colleagues are expected to learn teaching on the job. Whether or not this “do-it-yourself” method does the trick remains an open question.

Gabriela Gregušová’s book on *How to Teach Political Science? Experience of First-time University Teachers* is meant to start a discussion of the problems involved with the ‘do-it-yourself’ concept. The book is refreshing to read. What is described in the various chapters will strike a chord in the minds of young and old teachers as well.

The book originated in the European Political Science Network’s 2004 Prague Plenary Conference. I am happy to announce the volume because it is one of epsNet’s primary goals to promote and reflect on the quality of teaching. I have no doubt that the contributions will attract the attention of inexperienced university teachers and help them to do better than just to survive in the classroom.

Hans-Dieter Klingemann
President of the European Political Science Network

Paris, December 2004

Gabriela Gregušová

Introduction: Learning to Teach Political Science

This volume aims to help first-time university teachers of political sciences in their teaching of undergraduate students. It contains details of the experience of young educators from eight European universities in solving problems of their daily teaching praxis. Moreover, it includes papers by three experienced teachers, namely Lori Thorlakson (Nottingham University), Jan Vihan (Harvard University, Cambridge University) and Ladislav Kvasz (Comenius University) where they advise first-time teachers how to cope with some challenging tasks.

Training for first-time university faculty in Europe

There has been a strong focus on university education in Europe especially since the end of 1990s when the Bologna declaration was adopted. What is more, in 2000 the European Union set the aim to become the most competitive economy in the world. This goal should be reached by 2010 especially by the perfected performance of educational and scientific institutions. Many projects, actions and programs have been realized since the beginning of this discussion.

Still, relatively little has been done in the field of training new university teachers. In many countries they are not required to pass courses on teaching before becoming educators. In contrast, in a lot of countries, secondary school teachers are obliged to have a certificate in teaching. Sometimes, people not working in the institutions of higher education realize this paradox more than insiders. Some time ago I had a discussion with my friend who is a qualified high school teacher of English language.

Her question was simple and clear: *How can you teach without having the education of a teacher?*

Most first-time university teachers gain experience by their teaching practice learning from their own mistakes and discussions with colleagues at their university. Usually, there is only one young teacher leading a certain course at the university and he/she has no chance to debate specific problems of the seminar with an educator teaching the same subject.

Meetings of first-time university teachers from different European countries might overcome this difficulty. However, in Europe such meetings are rare in the whole discipline of social sciences. Only few examples can be mentioned. Namely, *International Management Teachers Academy* organized for young university faculty since 1999 by Central and East European Management Development Association (CEEMAN, in Bled, Slovenia). A second event, opened also for young political scientists, is a *Summer University for University teachers and professionals in the social sciences and humanities* (SUN) organized since 1996 by Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. Nevertheless, SUN consists of courses with special topics e.g. History and Nationalism in Central Asia etc. and it is not focused on general teaching methodology. In addition, both projects are less oriented in addressing particular problems of the participants and there is also only little space for sharing experience among the people who attend.

The epsNet project for first-time university teachers

Seeing a necessity to fill this gap, the European Political Science Network (epsNet) organized a workshop for inexperienced university teachers of political science. This volume comes out as a result of this project. The purposes of the project were first, to identify key problems new university teachers of political science struggle with, and secondly, to share experiences of how the participants of the project succeeded in solving the problems. The focus was not only on the examples of good practice but also on describing and analyzing ways which did not lead to the satisfaction on both teachers' and students' sides. In addition to sharing experience among young teachers three experienced lecturers presented their opinion on issues raised during the workshop.

The first workshop took place in June 2004 during the annual epsNet conference in Prague. Fifteen first-time university teachers, PhD. members of epsNet, from different European countries participated in the workshop. Prior to the workshop they sent a paper describing their experience of teaching to the workshop coordinator. The workshop was then composed of two parts. At the beginning of the session young participants received

training from three experienced teachers: L. Kvasz, L. Thorlakson and J. Vihan. Then four first-time teachers presented their papers. The presentations were followed by the discussion where participants shared experiences of the education of undergraduate students in political science. In a very enthusiastic and sincere discussion they talked about the problems they face.

The structure of the volume

This book is composed from participants' essays, lecturers' papers and conclusions from the Prague discussion. Containing their personal testimonies it focuses on several key problems inexperienced university teachers struggle with. The volume is structured according to these topics (authors of contributions are stated in parenthesis; some contributions touch more than one issue):

1. Motivation of students: How to make students more active? (Ladislav Kvasz, Cristina Stanus, Elizabeth Sheppard, Liz Monaghan)
2. Critical thinking: How to make students to think critically? (Jan Vihan, Andrei Gheorghita, Andreas Antoniadis, Aurelian Muntean)
3. Argumentation: How to reach a scholar level of the discussion during the lesson? (Luca Barani)
4. Originality: Which unusual activities could make a course more interesting and what is more could bring extra knowledge to the students? (Eszter Simon, Elizabeth Sheppard, Sophie Jacquot, Laurie Boussaguet, Lori Thorlakson)
5. Synergy: How to create an atmosphere of cooperation where all the participants enrich each others' knowledge? (Lori Thorlakson)
6. Respect: How to receive acceptance as a teacher? (Marta Daruľová)

Future of the project

The first successful workshop has encouraged the organizers not only to publish this volume but also to continue the project. The second workshop is planned for June 2005 in Paris as a panel of the epsNet annual conference. The organizers hope that young university teachers shall, in this way, be better able to use the information and experience of their colleagues during their daily practice at the university.

As an editor of this volume I would like to thank all the workshop participants for their knowing cooperation and my colleagues in epsNet for their advice and support. Especially, I would thank Bob Reinalda and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on a draft of this book.

Moreover, I would thank the Centre Français de Recherche en Sciences Sociales (CEFRES) in Prague for hosting the first workshop and finally Liz Monaghan, Elizabeth Sheppard and Brian Green for English language corrections.

Motivation

Elizabeth Sheppard

Motivating the Troops: The Challenge to First Time Teachers

Liz Monaghan

Methodology and 'IT' in the Teaching of Political Science

Ladislav Kvasz

On Possible Approaches to Motivation

Cristina Stanus

**Motivating Romanian Undergraduates While Teaching
Comparative Politics**

Elizabeth Sheppard

Motivating the Troops: The Challenge to First Time Teachers

Keeping them interested and motivated, what bigger challenge is there in the classroom when teaching undergraduates? The first day, how can you make something as basic- and let's face it, not always sexy, as introduction to international relations- interesting enough that they want to stay and learn more? The following short paper is an attempt to respond to this question by the bias of my own personal experience as a first time teacher in international relations. Firstly, the question of the lack of structure and mentoring for first time teachers is highlighted before getting into the solutions I myself use in the classroom to motivate the students and get them interested. Finally, the conclusion is dedicated to the questions that still remain unanswered and the eternal quest for new ideas and exercises that can keep them from falling asleep in class!

I personally thought it would be fairly easy, after all international relations are my specialty; I myself was sitting in their seat not so long ago and enjoyed every minute of it. I had a terrific professor and now I can only wonder how he did it. The first day, I can see their eyes wander already; one even falls asleep in class. It is boredom that has set in. Yet, how can you motivate them when you have to talk to them about the basics. It's a fine line between getting in the basics and making things more interesting (and often at the same time more understandable) to the students. You just can't escape teaching them levels of analysis. They still have to read Thucydides and Machiavelli after all. And let's face it, its not always sexy to read about collective security or cognitive dissonance. The extra knowledge **personal experience** can bring in, or **case studies** are

undeniable in motivating the troops. Theories are not simply just dry, but difficult to grasp for a first time IR student and realism and liberalism are so much more identifiable when we take a case study and apply it. When students understand, they are suddenly much more motivated.

But how do you find the right way to do it? There are few structures in place in most systems to give you pointers so you have to rely on your own imagination to motivate them. You can't simply give them candy, you have to teach them in a way that they want to learn, to participate. After all, motivation is also making them more involved, more interested in the topic at hand. Yet, its a constant challenge and one that is incredibly time consuming, if you are lucky there are websites that suggest activities in conjunction with the book (the benefit of English language texts) but often you have to be inventive just to keep their attention and yet you still have ones that fall asleep in class, stop reading the texts, stop coming to class, talk etc.

An exchange between teachers is important, often systems don't have built in mechanisms for this and with the exception of certain experienced professors who mentor you are on your own. It's quite intimidating; after all they look to you not only to teach them (after all they could simply read the books) but to make the material come alive. If it were a language class, I might have a number of ideas, but IR theory? You can't get past the sort of dry nature and into interesting and fruitful exercises unless you share with young teachers in the same position as yourself. And therein lies the problem, in France at least, you are sort of thrown into the lion's den without any arms whatsoever.

So what do you do? My experience is very limited. Before I officially began teaching undergraduates, I had a bit of experience as a speaker in master's programs talking about British Defence Policy, but graduate students are an entirely different audience and talking about ones own research is often easier than making them actually learn on a full time basis. This is my first time teaching IR and it's an enormous departure from the teaching English as a foreign language to schoolchildren that I did in college. My first days were pretty much an experimentation period, trying things I had seen work with my own classes as an undergraduate and graduate student like exposés or press clippings. My solutions have been multiple:

Getting them personally involved

This involves making them talk about their own experiences and letting them use their imagination (within reason). I have tried on the one hand to **make the term paper they have to hand in a very interesting assignment and personal for them.** They are being required to argue all

sides of the issue or problem of their choosing and search out the different sources that back up what they are trying to argue. This may seem very basic, but I had heard from other teachers that the students didn't put enough effort into the research and writing of the papers and I wanted it to be very personal so that it would motivate them to do their best. The tactic seems to work as they handed in paper topics early in the semester.

Part of the trick, is having them **share their own experiences**. My classes are very international (Swedish, Nigerian, Brazilian, Serb...you name it). Many of them have lived in countries that we can use as examples and most of them want to talk about it, to try and understand. By sharing their experiences with their classmates and me, both in class and in the paper, we have gotten a dialogue going. The latest question was whether realism's stance on morality (we read parts of Machiavelli) justifies just about any action in the name of state survival. We tried to discuss the case of Serbia and Slobodan Milosevic to illustrate the possible critiques we could make of realist theory and also discuss more in depth the teaching of Morgenthau whose book we are reading in its entirety.

The class had started off rather slowly, Morgenthau is pretty complex for them, but the example from their classmate got them into a good and long discussion about the relationship between morality and politics and how leaders make decisions to ensure state survival. In their papers, many are undertaking similar cases, using the subject they know best - home--and applying theories we are learning or subjects such as human rights that we will be going over. This obviously also can be a dangerous exercise, so we discuss all sides of the issue (and again they are required to do so in their papers). But, for now at least, it has kept them active in class and discussing not simply with me but with each other.

Getting them researching and thinking outside of the classroom

My other tactic for livening classroom discussion and motivating them has been to make them invest their own time and thinking into **bringing in an article they think is relevant to that week's topic**. They are required to prepare the article and a few discussion questions as well as explain and back up their own opinions. The week we studied the neorealism versus neoliberalism debate, a student brought in a *Foreign Affairs* article written by Colin Powell. This not only stimulated his thoughts on the subject, but led right into a long discussion on the debate that we were supposed to study that day.

Bringing in these articles has had a double objective. On the one hand, they are actually going out and looking for an article, but they are also

thinking about the article and its relationship to class topics. Thus, this accomplishes both the goals of research and critical thinking in one. I have also tried to submit myself to the same exercise, bringing in short texts, this time political philosophy such as the Melian dialogue and applying them to current events. Not only do these texts point to central themes in important topics such as realism, but it complements their more recent examples. As such we can ask how can we apply the conflict between the Athenians and Sparta to more recent examples and we can see the resilience of political theory throughout the ages.

Case studies

Theory can sometimes be a real challenge to first time international relations students. I noticed the first time we went over Morgenthau's six principles that they could certainly recopy what Morgenthau was saying, but applying it was totally unthinkable. After a bit of thinking, my strategy thus far has been **taking a case study that is familiar to them. The Cold War** seemed to be the example used the most by the book and yet they still were not catching on. So, I decided to use the various wars in the former Yugoslavia and the outside interventions by Europe and the US since they certainly would have seen it in the papers or on the news and at least heard it debated around them.

Thus far, we have gone over what kinds of questions each theory asks about such a case and what kind of challenges such cases present to theory. I have noticed an increased participation by the student's even by one who seemed to sleep through all the previous classes. I am hoping to keep this up so that they will learn to use these same questions on other cases and use the theory when they are watching the news, reading the paper and above all writing their research papers.

Despite these experiences that have thus far worked, I am constantly on the look out for new ideas. I have found it incredibly hard to find useful tools to motivate them and make the learning more attainable. The internet has been a fairly useful tool especially researching articles that might be of interest. I have tried to look to other more experienced professors with more or less success, some are very open and others simply take for granted that young professors are incompetent. As well, I have tried to share experiences with my contemporaries who are in the same position, but this isn't always easy as the French system doesn't allow for as much interaction on the PhD. level as is necessary. The challenge is still ever-present and I can still see boredom hovering ever so closely on the horizon.

Liz Monaghan

Methodology and ‘IT’ in the Teaching of Political Science

My experience comes from teaching second year undergraduate students at The University of Nottingham on the module *Social Survey Design and Analysis*. This is a research methods course, focussing specifically on the Social Survey as a method of data collection. The students are mostly from a Sociology background although the many of the issues that arise can be generalised across the social sciences. Students are required to apply their knowledge of social research in order to plan, design, and carry out a small scale research project using the survey method.

Teaching on this course comprises two main methods. Firstly, it involves assisting the students in applying their knowledge of the theory of social research to their own research projects. This means operationalising concepts and theories, selecting cases, sampling, developing research questions and hypotheses, and producing questionnaires. The second major component is instruction in the use of information technologies (‘IT’) in social survey design and analysis. This means understanding the way the software packages work and how to use them in order to produce the desired outcomes.

In this paper I discuss some of the issues that arise from my teaching, their relevance for teaching political science, and some of the difficulties and successes I have encountered along the way. In doing so I move along several levels of abstraction from broad issues of the role of methodology in the teaching of political science, to specific concerns focussed on the use of ‘IT’ as a teaching and learning tool.

Methodology and political science

The study of political science does not exist in a bubble. Yet often, students form the **impression that methodological issues are separate, or even peripheral to the content of what they are studying**. This can be exacerbated by the fact that courses in methodology are often introduced relatively late in the students' undergraduate careers. However, the issue of how social and political reality is studied is fundamental to the process of studying it, and to the understanding thereby gained. Undergraduates in the discipline of sociology tend to be introduced to methodological issues earlier.

The course I teach is an attempt to integrate these issues into the broader concerns of the sociological enterprise. It is designed to allow students the opportunity to put into practice in their own (small-scale) research project, some of the principles introduced in the classroom. As such, it demonstrates that the content of what is studied, and the way in which it is studied (or in this case researched) are in fact two sides of the same coin. **Addressing these issues at an earlier stage** in their degree programme could help students of political science to be more rigorous in their approach to the subject. It could help them to better see what is "scientific" about political science, and to recognise its' unique features. This in turn would contribute to the development of all-important reflexive and analytical skills.

Methodology through practice

The suggestion that methodological issues are central to political science has implications for the way in which it is taught. Teaching methodology in a separate course can reinforce the idea that it is separate from the mainstream content of political science. It can also exacerbate some of the problems students have with learning about methodological issues. There are some basic issues associated with approaches to research, research design, and methods that I had not fully understood or internalized until I had to address them in my own research.

The process of developing my own research methodology was instrumental in enabling me to really get to grips with these issues. They were no longer abstract ideas and concepts to be learnt alongside the content of what I was studying, but central issues that would affect and be affected by, my research topic. My suggestion, therefore, is that **methodological issues** should not be taught in abstract, but rather **should be incorporated into the topics the students are studying**. The strength of the Survey Design course is that it requires students to address issues of

social research by doing social research. The students don't write an essay about these issues, they confront and attempt to overcome them within the context of a small research project. This works well because problems they have read about in textbooks suddenly become "real" when they experience them firsthand.

The use of 'IT'

In teaching methodological issues in a hands-on way, the focus moves away from textbooks and essay-writing, and towards learning through doing. This has involved the extensive use of 'IT', to which many students have an in-built aversion. The course comprises workshop classes where my job is to introduce the software: we use Microsoft Publisher for designing questionnaires, and SPSS for analyzing data. I also set tasks for the students to work through and build up a familiarity with these applications.

Up to this point, many students have taken only classroom-based subjects and are wary of the different approach. Computers are viewed in negative terms rather than as tools which can make social research more efficient and easier. Moreover, there can be widely varying levels of capability between students. This, I would suggest, is more pronounced than in classroom-based teaching. On the one hand, some students are knowledgeable and confident, and for them using computers come naturally. For others it is much more difficult to grasp the basic features of the software, and they consequently require more guidance. Motivation, therefore, is vital here.

In attempting to overcome this difficulty, I have found that **a degree of empathy can be a useful tool**. It is important for the teacher to understand that for many of the students, the use of 'IT' is new and maybe a little intimidating. This has helped me to connect with the students individually and as a group, and to put the students at ease, emphasizing that **it's not necessarily difficult, just different**. In achieving this I think part of the key to success is due to **explaining things in a very step-by-step manner**.

A simple and straightforward approach works best, explaining that when using computers, one action leads to another and **the lines of causality are far more predictable than is often the case for qualitative methods**. It can be very satisfying for the students when they run commands in SPSS and get outputs. This is a tangible result that can help them to appreciate that 'IT' can help a great deal with their projects, and it also removes the perceived unpredictability some students feel 'IT' has. One of the major benefits of this course, that I also try and **sell to the students, is that it**

provides some important transferable skills. The ‘IT’ skills that students develop on this course will not only benefit them in their careers as undergraduate students (or for those who continue as postgraduate researchers), but equally importantly, in the job market once studies have been completed.

To conclude, I would argue that political science could learn from the way methodology is taught in other social science disciplines. A more hands-on approach to learning about methodology involves the active participation of the students and in this way can aid their understanding of what can otherwise seem like dry, irrelevant and unrelated issues. This approach has involved using ‘IT’ as a learning tool. There are parallels here with the teaching of methodology. Something that the students approach with trepidation can, if successfully taught, become something that ultimately aids their understanding. Furthermore, in the context of a higher education which is increasingly viewed as a commodity, the use of ‘IT’ achieves the twin objectives of assisting the students’ learning while preparing them in some way for the job market.

Ladislav Kvasz

On Possible Approaches to Motivation

- An experienced teacher's view

Motivation is doubtlessly one of the key issues in education. Coming from the field of mathematics I have a rather different background than most of the contributors. I hope that this difference will enrich the discussion. In what follows, I would like to discern four levels of motivation.

External motivation

The general public perceives mathematics as something incomprehensible, uninteresting and difficult. Therefore motivation is perhaps the central issue in the field of mathematics education. If we wish to win the students for mathematics **we must overcome these *barriers of stereotypes***. To this end we developed a whole network of activities in Slovakia, such as mathematical circles and summer camps, mathematical competitions and seminars. The aim of them is to bring children into contact with mathematics outside of the school. Thus for instance a mathematical summer camp is a normal summer camp, besides, that the children can listen to some mathematical lectures, participate in mathematical competitions and solve mathematical problems, and all this without getting marks and without being punished for mistakes. The aim is to associate mathematics rather with fun than with evaluation.

One of the favourite techniques used in mathematical camps are *mathematical fairy-tales*. They are just like normal fairy-tales full with princes, dragons, etc. The only difference is, that when the prince wants to save the princess, instead to fight with the dragon, the dragon gives him

some mathematical problems. The children are asked to help the prince to solve these problems. In this way the children forget, that mathematics is something incomprehensible, uninteresting and difficult and start to solve the same mathematical problems, which in the context of a school lesson would automatically evoke anxiety and fear. They are able to discuss mathematical problems for hours, and if they cannot succeed, they ponder over them even for days. Later, when problems of the same kind appear in the context of the school mathematics, the children are prepared to solve them and perform well. This kind of motivation can be called *external motivation*. The children solve mathematical problems not because these problems would interest them, but because they would like to help the prince.

In the field of political sciences the situation is perhaps a bit different than in mathematics. People usually do not consider political sciences being incomprehensible, uninteresting and difficult. On the contrary, the man or woman in the street thinks that he or she knows and understands nearly everything. This means that in political sciences there is also a *barrier of stereotypes*. It has only an opposite sign, but the effect of it is the same. It hinders students to study the subject seriously. The students of political sciences are perhaps a bit too old for a “*political fairy-tale*“ but maybe it would be possible to develop some similar techniques. The aim is simply to change the social roles of the participants. Thus it could be a kind of **political science fiction**, where due to a machine similar to that which Woody Allen described in his short story *The Kugelmass Episode*, the student could be transferred into a different time and a different country, where he or she would not know and understand everything, and so would be forced to start with serious study.

Internal motivation

Even though **external motivation can be important at the beginning of a course**, it is impossible to build a successful course solely on external motivation. After some time it is necessary to turn from external motivation to **motivation which is internal to the topic itself**. Our school system can be characterized by the principle that *we teach students the answers to questions they never heard of*. Thus a standard university course presents knowledge without explaining the problems, to which this knowledge is the solution. Perhaps in the field of political science this tendency is not so strong, but in mathematics it is dominant. Thus for instance we teach the Pythagorean Theorem without explaining for what reason did Pythagoras study the squares on the sides of a triangle.

This aspect of motivation can be clarified by contrasting two notions: *story* versus *system*. The process of the discovery and the development of a theory is a story, in which each step is motivated by problems occurring on the previous steps. I suggest calling this kind of motivation *internal motivation* of the theory. Nevertheless, when we discuss these theories in our papers or present them in our courses, we have a tendency to give them the form of a system. In such a system the notions and principles are logically ordered and the whole theory is deductively developed. In this way the story is replaced by the system.

Therefore I believe that a good university course is one which tries to recapture the internal motivation and **to present the theory in accordance with the original story of its discovery**. This, of course doesn't mean to follow all the turns and changes of the actual history. It is sufficient to present the notions, problems and principles roughly in the order, in which they appeared. Every theory, when it was discovered, appeared to its discoverer as something fascinating, interesting and important. The goal of a good university teacher should be to incorporate into his or her course at least a portion of this original emotional charge.

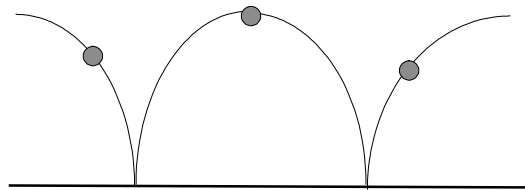
Motivation to overcome cognitive resistance

Even if we learn to incorporate the internal motivation into the theories we teach, sooner or later we discover another interesting phenomenon connected with motivation. It is related to the fact, that every new theory was at the beginning confronted with a considerable opposition. Part of this opposition has social roots—it is the opposition of the well-established elder generation against the excesses of the youngsters or outsiders (new ideas often come from outsiders). But the social aspect is only a part of the resistance, which every new theory encounters. Often even close friends and supporters of the discoverer are not able to accept the new ideas. The historian of mathematics Michael Crowe went even further when he remarked that “new theories come forth not at the bidding but against the efforts of those, who create them“. I suggest calling this cognitive aspect of the resistance, with which new theories are encountered *cognitive resistance*. It is very important to be aware of its existence. It can explain the fact, that even if we motivate our students well, if we pay due attention to the external and internal aspects of motivation, it still can happen, that we fail.

In order to understand the phenomenon of cognitive resistance it is necessary to study the history of the subject, to look at the debates around the particular theory, to analyze the arguments and motives of scholars, who resisted its acceptance. It often happens, that the same or similar

arguments appear also in the classroom, and that the students have difficulties exactly with the same aspects of the theory, with which scholars of the past had. The phenomenon of the cognitive resistance has to do with the fact, that **the minds of our students are not some empty containers**, which only wait to be filled with new knowledge. These containers are already full and so **we cannot simply add new knowledge**. Our task is **rather to transform and restructure** the content of the container so that the new knowledge is integrated with the old one.

The German professor of physics Nachtigal made a very interesting discovery, when he tested secondary school teachers (not students but teachers!) of physics. He gave them problems like the following one: “A ping-pong ball was jumping across the table. In the diagram we have drawn its motion during three jumps and have indicated some positions of the ball. Please draw the force that acts on the ball in each of these positions.”



Of course, the main force, which acts on the ball, is gravity. Its direction is downwards. What Nachtigal discovered, however, was that a significant portion of the teachers draw the forces as if they were acting in the direction of the motion of the ball itself. This is exactly as Aristotle would draw them. Thus the teachers solved the problem not in the framework of the Newtonian physics, the physics they teach in their classrooms, but in the framework of the Aristotelian physics, about which they know that it is false. This test shows that even after five years spent at the university studying modern physics, the older layer of the Aristotelian physics is still present. It also shows, how ineffective is the teaching which only adds new knowledge, but does not relate it to the intuitive knowledge already present in the minds of the students. The teachers, who were tested by Nachtigal, passed their exams, which mean that they know well the correct Newtonian answers.

The only problem is that this new knowledge was not confronted with the older layer of Aristotelian physics, and was simply added. Of course, if we would formulate the problem in the language of the Newtonian physics, that is, if we would say, that “an elastic body is moving in the field of the gravitational force...”, they would solve the problem using the Newtonian physics. The trick of the test is, that it formulates the problem in the ordinary language. It speaks simply about a ping-pong ball instead of an

elastic body. In this way the test steers around the Newtonian theory and targets directly the Aristotelian layer.

This short episode from physics education shows that the cognitive conflicts cannot be left aside. If we try to ignore them, if we do not allow our students to manifest the cognitive resistance and to discuss the issue properly, we might produce experts similar to the above mentioned physics teachers. They will be able to pass the exams, but will be left with many fragments of not integrated knowledge. In order to make a successful course, it is therefore important to engage into something, what in the theory mathematics education already has its name: *cognitive conflict*.

The theory of cognitive conflict is based on the belief, that cognitive resistance cannot be overcome in a gradual way. **It is necessary to “provoke” the conflict**, to engage in a confrontation of the new knowledge with the implicit theories already present in the minds of the students. The role of the teacher in such situation is to help the students to overcome the cognitive resistance. Therefore it is necessary to prepare the students for the conflict, and after its outbreak, to help them to steer it into the correct direction. This aspect of teaching is everything but not easy. It requires a good knowledge of history, an ability to present arguments and to steer discussion. Perhaps the most important aspect is **to determine the correct time, when** the students are prepared for the cognitive conflict. If the teacher starts it too early, it will cause only muddle and disorientation in the minds of students.

If Newton would come into ancient Athens and tried to persuade the ancient Greeks, that their physics is wrong, they would expel him. It required at least two centuries of discussions about the Ptolemaic system of the world (starting in the 15th century) that scholars identified the problems within the Aristotelian world-picture. The long process of discussions about the problems of the Aristotelian world-picture can be seen as a kind of motivation of the Newtonian theory. During these discussions a discontent appeared, which was addressed by Newton. Thus here we have a third kind of motivation, something which could be called *cognitive motivation*. It has nothing to do with making fun on the lectures (external motivation). It is different also from showing, that the subject is internally interesting (internal motivation).

Cognitive motivation is rather a gradual process in which the cognitive structure of the student is being prepared for a radical shift. The student is prepared for a successful transition from one conceptual scheme to another. The cognitive motivation is a motivation, which motivates the student to abandon the notions and ways of thinking which are familiar, well known and natural to him and to replace them by something rather unfamiliar,

strange and alien. It is perhaps the most difficult part of the whole teaching, to help the students to change their whole cognitive structure, the way how they perceive problems, how they understand the world requires a really deep understanding of the subject. In a cognitive conflict the teacher cannot hide behind memorized knowledge. When he or she enters the cognitive conflict, all the rifts between layers of his or her own not integrated knowledge become visible. And this is perhaps the most interesting thing on teaching. In discussions with students we can learn something about ourselves, about our own understanding and misunderstandings and so move forward in our cognitive development.

Cristina Stanus

Motivating Romanian Undergraduates While Teaching Comparative Politics

Differences in the quality of learning are differences due to the ways students go about learning; and these differences can in turn be explained in terms of their experience of teaching
(Ramsden 2003:19-20).

Knowing that students have really learned something is probably the greatest satisfaction that an educator could have. But learning goes beyond quantitative increase in factual knowledge, memorizing and performing well in assessment. What students really learn is dependent on their motivation, and teachers are expected to play an important part in that. This essay results from my experience this past semester in teaching Comparative Politics to 2nd year students. I shall discuss shifting motivations and learning approaches of students faced with a graduation examination subject and with active learning methods.

Issues in motivating Romanian students

The first step in motivating students is assessing what they have learned and how they learn. Motivating my Romanian students proved to be easy, from some points of view, but also challenging, from other points of view. In Romania students graduate from high schools that, in spite of all attempts to reform pre-university education, emphasize quantitative increase in factual knowledge, memorizing and performing well in assessment. For young adults who have recently graduated from high school education is all about memorizing in order to get good grades and

getting a degree. This degree equals a better chance of getting a decent job, a decent standard of living, and, why not, a career.

Another effect of this type of pre-university education is the way the students approach learning - surface learning, without trying to understand the inner workings of phenomena and facts, seems to be enough. This is why students surpass with difficulty the black and white stage, in which fact and opinion are the same. And even if they do go beyond this stage, they find themselves **expecting the teacher to tell them what to think**. Motivation proved to be related to the students' approach to learning. Changing student's approach to learning from a surface to a deep one¹, as well as trying to change the motivation they draw on, is quite a challenge for Romanian universities. And it usually does not happen in two semesters.

My 2nd year students seemed to be divided into three groups: internally motivated students, externally motivated students, and non-motivated students. The **internally motivated students** were the fewest and their **preoccupation with furthering their knowledge** and academic interest made them able to structure and organize content, to distinguish argument from structure and to relate course content to previous courses, such as Introduction to Political Science. These students' approach to learning is a deep one. The **externally motivated students** constituted most of my over 100 2nd year students - **getting a good grade seemed to be their motto**; their approach to learning is a surface one. Very special is the case of those **non-motivated students** - they don't want to learn anything; they are here only because "their parents told them so". There is nothing I can say about them, because these students, if they haven't dropped out of school yet, they "don't show up".

The uses of active learning when dealing with Romanian students

The use of active learning helped both internally and externally motivated students. The discussion on political communication benefited from in-class **presentations of political campaigns, spots and speeches**, helping students to demarcate different stages in the evolution of political communication. An in-class **exercise focusing on applying coalition theories to governing coalitions in Romania** helped students get familiar with different types of coalitions and with the policy impact of such

¹ The old and the new paradigm of learning as defined by H. Fry, S. Katteridge and S. Marshall (eds.), *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Enhancing Academic Practice*, London, Kogan Page, p. 12, and P. Ramsden, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, 2nd edition, London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 27-28 and 47.

coalitions. **Home assignments** demanding students to compare different political systems or single out what they thought to be the main features of the Romanian political system, required them to carefully read the literature and challenged them to understand concepts in order to be able to apply them to the real world. What has particularly attracted students to comparative politics was the suggestion that they might **learn something that can help them explain current political events in Romania**. Romania was in fact the preferred case study during the entire semester.

But the use of in-class presentations, home assignments and case studies was only possible due to their enclosure in the final grade. Romanian students don't speak in class unless this brings them a part of the final grade. Home assignments and case studies require supplementary library work, so they are avoided. **In order to convince students to learn, you have to excessively emphasize assessment**, and this is a slide back. Some students continue to believe that getting an education is about performing well in assessment.

What have I learned

First of all I have learned that **I had the advantage of the subject**. In my university Comparative Politics is a graduation examination subject. So using the authority argument worked - telling to externally motivated students that this is a graduation examination subject, and that not understanding its concepts makes them unable to understand further courses made them take it serious. In the process of coping with this fact some of them discovered that deep learning really helps. The place occupied by Comparative Politics in the Political Science curriculum transformed some externally motivated - surface learners in occasional, perhaps permanent, deep learners. This does not exclude the importance of using active learning methods. This change would have never occurred if I had offered my students just some lectures and expected them to take notes. Active learning was definitely not the cause of this change, but it has certainly been the instrument.

Critical Thinking

Jan Vihan
The Prague School

Andrei Gheorghita
**Teaching Students How to Think Critically and Actively Express
Their Opinions**

Andreas Antoniadis
**Knowledge Transfer vs. Knowledge Production in the Educational
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Issues in Implementing New Methods in Course Design

Jan Vihan

The Prague School

- An experienced teacher's view

Every country, and to a degree every university, has an educational tradition that one as a teacher needs to be mindful of. That is particularly true for such an ancient institution as Charles University (founded 1348) where I happen to be teaching. Looking outside (to America, England, India and China) has opened my eyes to aspects of Czech educational tradition which have long been forgotten or ignored. Drawing on some of the most influential pedagogues active in the Czech lands I would like to reflect on the nature and purpose of undergraduate education today, stressing points I find particularly relevant to present situation at my school.

Jan Hus

Charles IV. founded Prague's university so that Czech students would no longer need to go abroad to study as well as to attract Central Europe's brightest minds. Fifty years later Prague became the centre of European learning and that epoch produced Jan Hus (+1415), a preacher, professor, and president of the university. Hus argued for the importance of learning in the native language alongside Latin. Inspired by the Oxford thinker John Wycliffe Hus developed three principle ideas about learning.

First, the right to dominion that the medieval church and its priests claimed over the possessions and souls of their subjects should come from a particular way of life. Teacher's authority is not based on just an institutional position or expertise in a particular subject. **A teacher inspires as a human being** as much as a specialist, and teaches individuals, not

degree candidates. Relating to students over a beer is as important as relating over a book.

Second, everyone is capable of finding for herself what good life is. Unfortunately most willingly give up this capacity. The goal of undergraduate education is to teach **critical thinking, and learning this skill takes priority over learning “material”**. Since most students get stuck in modes of thinking about their subject, encouraging them to take classes in other departments opens new ways of thinking to them. Teacher’s role vis-à-vis an undergraduate is not to instil or criticize ideas, but to focus on ways of argumentation- how one identifies a thesis, how one supports it, how one takes it apart, how meticulous one needs to be. One should balance sympathetic reading with a critical one; one should first identify the good points and only then, from that perspective, criticize shortcomings.

Once a student begins formulating her own idea one needs to be militantly supportive, exclaiming “excellent point, yes, yes!” etc. After all, it is truly exciting to see someone think independently. One learns much more from observing an example than from theoretical analysis. Best way to learn to write essays is to read good ones. Writing is an exercise in thinking, not a summarization of material. **A student first needs to learn to say an idea in one or five pages**, most students are not ready to sustain an argument for twenty pages until their third year. Writing is also a highly private affair; I would never read a student’s paper in front of a large class. On the other hand, in a small class it fosters mutual understanding among students.

In a discussion I would not disclose my idea until the very end, if at all. Young students are prone to adopt ideas of their teachers. On the other hand, argumentation for argumentation’s sake, or pretending to hold a position just to provoke a student is an irresponsible behaviour bound to misguide students. When staging a debate it is useful to have students send position papers to the teacher before the class so that you can play their ideas against each other. If one designs a lecture course, one should state her own agenda outright in the first session of the class.

Finally, Hus held that the **purpose of learning is finding truth rather than finding fame or use**. Too often we are bound on discovering patterns that make us fall into a delusion that we have the definitive understanding of material rather than a particular one. A student needs to believe in her own idea, yet be tolerant of others. The point of a humanistic education is not to teach an understanding of the world, but to unteach all those understandings with which students have been indoctrinated since childhood. To free mind of delusions rather than to enforce new ones.

A student should come out of a class like from reading a novel. By novel I mean a complex picture of the world that cannot be reduced to a simple explanation. Students should learn to be surprised rather than to look for confirmations; they should learn to write various styles so that they can develop their own. To schematize them into a particular format of essays is to kill their thinking. It is all too easy to use evidence to support one's point even if one knows one is mistaken. The academia can instil in its students the principle that truth not righteousness is the goal of human endeavour; they will hopefully keep a piece of this principle in real life.

Comenius

Comenius, a 17th century thinker from Moravia who spent most of his life in exile in Holland, believed **learning should be in the first place fun**. Grades are an institutional imposition, motivation coming from grades is deadly. One should focus on the process of discovery and creativity, and, ironically, the best discoveries are made when one does not take oneself too seriously. As a teacher I like to ridicule myself at least two times in a class. Learning is just a play, big egos and convictions are for politicians to hold.

In his “Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart” (one of the best works of Czech literature of all times) Comenius' main character goes around world's learning institutions and depicts the vanity of scholars without hope and faith. In the quest to subdue nature man has reduced himself to a servant of his own concepts, few find hope and redemption in today's dominant modes of knowledge. By faith Comenius meant the opposite of dogma, namely the courage to challenge every one of one's suppositions and find hope and meaning in one's own ignorance rather than in one's proud knowledge. How to bring faith back into academia is perhaps a question for another conference.

Dobrovsky and Masaryk

During the age of enlightenment, Dobrovsky, a priest and linguist from Prague, instilled in his students the idea that any piece of scholarship must be grounded in meticulous evidence, that a single misspell has as catastrophic results for one's argument as its lack of coherence. As a teacher one needs to balance the excitement for student's idea with the need to **prevent habitual sloppy work**.

In the late 19th century the sociology professor (later to become the founder and first president of Czechoslovakia) Masaryk argued that one needs to turn ideas into reality, not just debate them in a pub or classroom.

It is important to demonstrate on an example how one can be idealistic in one's actions- by that I mean **believing in the power of ideas to transform the world** rather than making ideas the servant of the world. In Masaryk's case it is also important to demonstrate how a successful doer rarely is a meticulous scholar- Masaryk's inquiry is deeply rooted in his perception of the mals of his day and the need to transform it from within.

Cimrman

Finally, Jara Cimrman (born around 1866), a Czech globetrotter from Vienna, stated six educational principles.

First, the **principal of passing information**. Cimrman noticed that only ten percent of the material he delivers to the class stays in the students' heads. He divided his material into "pomnenka" and "zapomnenka" (in German die Vergissmichnichtmeinung and die Vergissmichmeinung, in English "forget-me-not" and "forget-me") and clearly stated what is to be forgotten and what is to be remembered. He would examine his students not just on what they remember, but more importantly, on whether they by some accident did not memorize material which was to be forgotten. Along the lines of this principle one should weigh one's words, the more verbose one is in stating that which is important, the less likely it will be stored in students' heads. So while on off-subjects one can digress, on crucial points one must stick to the point.

Second, **shock fixation**. Cimrman would drop a glass when stating a crucial idea, the students would be startled and the shock of hearing a shattered glass would imprint the idea in them. Rather than dropping a flower pot I tell a joke- joke is not just a means of lightening up the class. Well directed it is a memorable vehicle for an idea.

Third, **practicality**. One should learn to memorize poems, speeches, stories, so that one becomes a skilled rhetoretician in a pub or TV-debate setting. All too often one hears "learn things that will fill your stomach", the well-wishers implying economics, engineering, etc. It is crucial to find a way in which the most obscure of learnings can prove to be a winning horse. For example, originality is the code word of European culture, most like to stress how they disagree with others and how unprecedented their ideas are. It pays off to teach students the subversive method of other (e.g. Indian) cultures where one promotes an original idea by presenting it as an old one. This is useful - people's egos are hurt when one tells them she disagrees. They are much better persuaded if one tells them "yes, yes, I agree" and then turns the argument on its head.

Fourth, **futurism**. Most things one learns in school are based on the need

of yesterday. Overloaded with yesterday's patterns of the world, the mind becomes unused to looking on its own and atrophies. Yet mind is not subjected to biological aging like the body. As long as one wakes up as a new being every morning, as long as one is ready to constantly challenge one's understanding, one can adapt to new circumstances, and stay young. Unlearning patterns is therefore more important for tomorrow's knowledge than acquiring them.

Fifth, **enlivened wood**. As a drama teacher in Peru, Cimrman noticed that much of his cast were poor actors. Simply stated, they were wooden. Cimrman used the principal of puppet theater- he tied strings on actors' hands and when they were reciting a poem he would pull on strings from behind. As teachers we need to be realistic. Only a very small percentage of humans is capable of thinking on their own. In many cases, rather than being careful about not interfering in the student's original thinking process, one need to lead them with directed questions to a particular discovery. In an ideal situation this should not be done. Every student should have the freedom to arrive at whatever destination. If that is not possible, than rather than stating an answer one should create an illusion for the student that she is arriving at an original interpretation on her own, rather than through the teacher's signposts. The process of discovery cues things in the mind far better than times stated truth. These students are initially puppets, but I have often been surprised at how many of the puppets after some string pulling were able to set off on their own course of inquiry.

Finally, **punishing of a student by punishing the teacher**. Cimrman's supposition is that the relationship between a student and teacher is love. Nothing can hurt the student more than seeing the teacher suffer. Rather than beating students with a stick or bad grades Cimrman would say: "Well, Vonasek, you did not do your homework, I am not going to smoke my cigar tonight. Don't cry, you yourself have caused this." Cimrman criticized the idea of grading. It can cause the students to cheat, which is the worst possible tendency at school since it goes directly against the process of learning, which is process of discovery, not the result.

Second, in the Anglo-American world is rooted the idea of fairness, students are measured against each other and grading is done on a Gauss curve. This implants in the minds the **delusion that learning can be a competitive process**, that one beats the other in intelligence rather than being respectful of each other's gifts. It assumes that people's abilities are commensurable and reduces complex individuals to an aspect oriented robots. The **student herself should grade her exam**- one needs to be honest above all with oneself whether one has done her best or not.

I often get students to the point that they themselves demand to be thrown out of the oral exam and insist on coming back later. I have seen either too much emphasis on competitive individual learning or on group learning (where essentially a couple of individuals do the work while the rest goes on a free ride). Learning needs to be presented as collaboration where every student with her particular abilities can be an equal cork in the machine. Making films rather than writing essays has proved to be a good way to achieve such collaboration. It is surprisingly easy and cheap with the digital technology available today and film is inherently a group endeavour, unlike the private sphere of writing.

While traditional societies stress the hierarchy of the student-teacher relationship, and while the American system emphasizes the equal position of a learner and teacher, Cimrman argues for the middle way. A teacher needs to respect students' ideas, learning needs to be a partnership between the teacher and student, yet the notion that there is one who knows and passes down the knowledge and there is a learner who attentively absorbs this knowledge is as central as encouraging free thought and inquiry. In Cimrman's view both the teacher and the students are responsible for each other's well-being.

Andrei Gheorghita

Teaching Students How to Think Critically and Actively Express Their Opinions

Critical thinking is the most fruitful challenge for understanding, as it implies the correct use of concepts, analysis, evaluations, and inference. For a teacher, the degree to which his/her students are able to consistently criticize is the best proof of their correct understanding of things. However, **thinking critically also implies liberty and responsibility: the liberty of expressing your opinions and the responsibility of doing this in a fair way.** This is the starting point in discussing about how to teach students think critically in post-totalitarian countries like Romania.

A culture of reproducing words

Thinking critically is not a common ability for common students in the Romanian education system. The explanations for this situation usually lay on cultural grounds, in the so-called “politics of duplicity” in the communist period. In order to survive the communist terror, people developed a parallel ego that spoke in slogans. Criticizing or expressing personal opinions was dangerous, and the easiest way of avoiding that was reproducing the official discourse, the so-called wooden language. There was no danger in that and soon this culture of reproducing words deeply translated in the field of education. Information became mainly accumulated and was analyzed very little. Learning lessons by heart, achieving knowledge without the least sense of usefulness, were common practices in the education during the communist period. After 1989, things changed very little, and mainly in the field of higher education, where

opportunities of contact with Western educational systems became largely widespread. So, this is the general framework of our topic of analysis; let's now focus on the students.

Gaining confidence, teaching responsibility

As I emphasized earlier, critical thinking is mainly a question of liberty and responsibility. Well, when they enter the universities, for most of the Romanian junior undergraduate students both features are deficiently shaped. This is the first challenge a teacher has to answer – make your students talk and, when they do it, make them assume and support their ideas. From my experience of teaching, **first year students are surprised when someone asks for their opinions**. They are not used to that and they like it, but almost none of them dares to clearly express his/her point of view. You can usually hear a choir of murmured opinions, expressed louder or lower, but still indistinctly.

This is the moment when the teacher gains or loses the confidence and support of his/her students. It is a time when maximum diplomacy is requested from the teacher: **openness to students' ideas, the art of building through questions, rectifying without frightening**. Once the acceptance and confidence of students are achieved, the golden pathway of expressing ideas is wide open – ideas are freely exchanged, related, and supported. And the rational support for your own ideas is a basic form of responsibility.

The ability to think critically comes later, once the lesson of responsibility is fully learned. Most scholars are comfortable with critical approaches to materials, they understand that critical does not necessarily mean negative. But this is not the case for many undergraduate students². They might learn to perform critical analysis, but they are not prepared to accept critiques. This is another factor that inhibits the public expression of their critical thinking – if they do not interfere, they cannot become subjects of critiques or contradictory discussions. Once the lesson of liberty and responsibility is accepted by the students, there are at least three different paths towards making critical thinking functional inside the class.

A first scenario

In a first scenario, students may simply avoid the expression of their

² For an interesting coverage of this topic, see Mary S. Alexander, "The Art of Teaching Students to Think Critically", in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 45, Issue 48, 1999.

critiques. There are academic opinions coming from more or less famous scholars that they prefer to take for granted, accepting the argument of power: “big guys” can’t be wrong. If the teacher asks for a well-founded critique of an opinion expressed in a reading material, the class answer is usually silence, doubled by a severe avoidance of eye contact. At those times, the ceiling of the room or the personal notes become a particularly interesting view for most of the students. No one has an answer or no one dares to express one. From my experience, this tends to become a dead-end situation if the teacher doesn’t carefully manage such a “crisis”. What are the ways out I suggest? My experience says (I also include here my readings) the teacher should try to:

1. **Drive students’ attention towards comparing.** If they compare contending theories or apparently similar cases they are familiar with, it may be easier to identify the weak points and the strong points of each theory.
2. Try not to develop the arguments *in abstracto*, but **contextualize**: focus on familiar cases, or build hypothetical challenges (“what if” situations), together with lots of follow-up questions. For example: “Which would be the chances of democracy in a North Korea conquered by the American troops?”, or “How well does Kitschelt’s theory of democratization fit the Romanian case?”.
3. **Offer step-by-step examples** in order to guide the students towards thinking differently about the controversial issue. It is probable that students, getting used to managing such explicative chains, will be prepared to repeat such inferences.
4. **Use empathetic comments** or enthusiastic remarks in order to encourage the students’ interventions³. The teacher should also act as a trainer, marching on the psychological dimension of his formative mission.
5. Home assignments, consisting of writing **short position papers**, would also be beneficial in preparing the students to identify arguments for or against different theories relevant for the specific field of the course. These exercises would highly contribute to the development of the analytical skills needed for a social scientist.
6. When building a seminar syllabus, try to offer **different perspectives** on the same issue by recommending, whenever it’s possible, contending or complementary reading materials.

³ See also Brian K. Payne & Randy R. Gainey, “Understanding and Developing Controversial Issues in College Courses”, in *College Teaching*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2003.

A second scenario

In a second scenario, a small number of students (or even a single one) may want to express their opinions, while the large majority of students adopt a rather passive attitude. Two possible sub-scenarios may occur.

In a first case, the few students involved in discussions may be motivated by symbolical needs, as to “prove something’ to the rest of the class or, even worse, personal vendettas. In other words, they use critique as an attack weapon pointed towards their fellow students. Such behaviour is highly damaging for the general course of the discussion, as it favours distortions and brings about unscholarly arguments. Nevertheless, it induces tensions in the class and inhibits the appetite for discussions of many students. In such a sub-scenario, a prompt intervention of the teacher is a must. From my experience, there are two directions the teacher should follow: **inhibit the ‘louds’ and stimulate the ‘silents’**. Carefully playing the devil’s advocate by offering contrary perspectives to the arguments of those monopolizing discussions is, in my opinion, the best way to achieve the first task. For the second task, I strongly recommend the use of verbal cues,⁴ especially **calling students by names**, in order to drive the other students say what they have to say and take the lead of discussions.

In the second sub-scenario, students involved in controversial discussions are driven exclusively by scholarly reasons in expressing their critiques, but they still remain very few. In such cases, there is a strong need for making the rest of the class more active. Calling the students by their names would only be the first step. **Offering consistent bonuses for particularly interesting comments**, perspectives, or critiques to indicated issues would highly stimulate critical and innovative thinking. To these I should probably add at least the middle four of the six ways out presented for the first scenario, as the nature of non-participation in class remains the same.

As I have tried to assess earlier, helping students to think critically is a real challenge for every teacher. We are usually aware of the solutions, but it remains to be seen how prepared any of us is to fruitfully implement them.

⁴ See again Brian K. Payne & Randy R. Gainey, “Understanding and Developing Controversial Issues in College Courses”, in *College Teaching*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2003.

Andreas Antoniadis

Knowledge Transfer vs. Knowledge Production in the Educational Process

This is an essay on the student class and its function and significance in the age of internet and electronic learning. As such, it is an essay on motivation, active participation, critical thinking, team dynamics, innovation and originality; in one word it is an essay on the Educational process. The essay starts by arguing that a **combination of educational methods** is necessary for creating an interesting and inspiring course. It then goes on to elaborate on the purposes of these methods, and how they (can) contribute to the Educational process. The overall conclusion is that for an academic course to achieve its aims, the stakes must be set as high as possible, and **imagination, flexibility and experimentation** must be the underlying principles of its design and run.

Combination of educational methods

The first important point concerns *how* a course should be run. Based on my short experience I would argue that in order for a course to reach its “educational potentials” it needs to be based on a combination of educational methods. That is, at the very minimum, it needs to combine both lectures and seminars, and it needs to secure a good co-ordination between these two. However the “course format” on its own is not capable of generating an inspiring and motivating educational environment. I would say that for such an environment to be created one needs to make clear from the outset to the students what is the purpose of the lectures and what is the purpose of the seminars, i.e. the pedagogical forums on which

the teaching of the course is based.

Communicating the course-format and its purpose

Thus, in abstract and crude terms the “*forum of lecture*” should be communicated by all the participants as a space of “*knowledge transfer*”; a space where the students will expect to learn and get information about specific themes; along with directions and incentives for exploring further these themes and their relevance to the various spheres of human activity. On the other hand the educational “*forum of seminar*” should be defined and communicated from the outset as a forum of “*knowledge production*”- “*knowledge creation*”, rather than one of “knowledge transfer”.

Furthermore, the functions of “knowledge transfer” and “knowledge production”, and the elements of sociology of knowledge underlying them should not just be elaborated in the initial organizational session but should be stressed throughout the year. It is essential to become clear to the students that the seminar is not there to test the knowledge “transferred” through the lectures; it is not there to re-stir, or even “secure”, the knowledge gained through the requested readings; but it is there to create new knowledge, to open “new dimensions” and define new “thought-paths”. My experience is that by doing so, the interest of the students is reinvigorated and the dynamics of the group are increased. Therefore I would argue that the success of the course very much depends on how clear this dual structure (lectures/seminars) and its purpose is communicated by the participating students, and how much it has been invested with their trust and support.

To conclude, based on my experience, I strongly believe that by following such an educational strategy the seminar becomes a pedagogical moment of transcendence rather than a moment of knowledge entrancement or safeguard; it becomes a “pure” Educational moment. It is important to re-emphasize here that the only way to enact such a “pure” educational moment is to communicate and treat the seminar as a forum destined for knowledge creation rather than knowledge transfer. Whenever I have made these rules-of-the-game clear to the students, I have experienced a unique “knowledge density” within the seminar. I have observed passion and impressive motivation from the side of the students, even for topics that I found myself dull and boring, thinking that the respective seminars would not “work”. Based on the above, I would say that by putting what is at stake in the seminar high for all (teacher and students), the seminar becomes a highly interactive and inspiring place that generates critical capacity and original thinking.

Using session-specific participatory “tactics”: flexibility and experimentation

The above seminar-strategy needs also to be enhanced with a number of session-specific **participatory tactics and games**. For instance in a course on “regionalism” a number of students (10-15) can be asked to prepare and present on a map at the board short presentations (2-3 min) on the membership, purposes and activities of “less known” (at least in the “West”) regional organizations such as APEC, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, COMESA, Union of the Americas, African Union, OPEC, Arab League etc. Along the same lines “class debates” and “simulation games” can frequently be mobilized. Examples again based on the course I am teaching (i.e. International Political Economy-IPE) include: a debate on the effectiveness of WTO in promoting freer and fairer trade; a simulation of a hypothetical international meeting in which representatives from different states, multinational enterprises, international organizations, NGOs, extremist groups etc. meet to discuss the “pros” and “cons” of globalization.

Furthermore, it is important, if possible, that the “content” of seminars is characterized by a certain degree of flexibility, to allow for **current issues** relevant to the course to be productively integrated in the course problematique. In the case of IPE and considering the limited time of the seminars (1-1.5 hour), this has proved possible only in the format of short-time debates. Thus, the first 30-45 minutes, the seminar focuses on the specified in the syllabus general theme, while the remaining time is devoted to **specific case-study debates**. Examples include debates on “**Should Britain join the Euro?**” (in a session on Political Economy and National Interest), or “**US steel tariffs: is it Legal?**” (in a session on WTO).

It is important to note here that in the case of the latter debate, the two opposing teams have collected and used a great number of specific arguments (using newspaper articles as a guide) that we would not have had the opportunity to explore in either the lecture or in the seminar, even though they were very central to the WTO session. Moreover, it is also very important that through such educational techniques the seminar- as-a-forum-of-knowledge-creation is invested more and more with the trust and interest of the students. Furthermore, the participation of the students in the selection (and preparation) of such debates makes them feel an integral part of the seminar, and makes the seminar **feel more and more like a truly dynamic and open ended knowledge endeavour**.

Based on the above I think that a certain degree of flexibility and experimentation, from the side of the teacher, is needed for the seminar to

reach its knowledge creation task/purpose, and thus it should be encouraged by the senior academics who are responsible for the course or the programme of studies.

Class-packs as a barrier: sociology of knowledge as a solution

A final issue is related to the course syllabus itself and especially with the increasing demand from the students for “class packs” i.e. ready-made photocopy packs, containing all the “required readings” and distributed in the beginning of the course. This trend follows the general trend towards the commercialization of education; a trend that treats, the student as customer, and the university as a commercial business. It is within this context that class-packs are introduced and conceptualised as customer service improvements. From my point of view the practice of **class-pack opposes any sense of liberal education**, but it is important to stress here that the class-packs in practice significantly reduce the possibilities and potentials for originality and original thinking within the class/seminar, and in an ideational level they generate the wrong perception of what knowledge is, and how it can be acquired.

Thus, in fact they reproduce **spoon-feeding practices** found at the level of secondary education. Again, I have found that discussing these issues with the students, and adding the above caveats to any class-pack circulated, has a positive effect on the dynamics of the seminars. This experience has fed further my “prejudice” that issues and aspects of “sociology of knowledge” found in the everyday practicing of teaching, where possible, need to be discussed and negotiated at the class-level. For, such a (continuous) negotiation seems to me, a one-way road towards an education able of generating original thinking and preparing critical citizens.

Aurelian Muntean

Issues in Implementing New Methods in Course Design

Combining different experience with a reforming academic field

Teaching political science when returning to the home country after studying in a different academic system represents an interesting experience. It implies not only adapting teaching methods to the realities, but also initiating new teaching methods and new course structures. The experience is even more interesting and stimulating when taking into account the process of reform in the higher education sector in East Central Europe.

When I graduated, three years ago, from the Central European University, an American-based university in Budapest, I was offered the possibility to teach comparative politics at the Bucharest National School of Political and Administrative Studies, SNSPA, the Faculty of Political Science. The opportunity was challenging, because the teaching of political science is under construction in Romania. One year later I was given the opportunity to teach, apart from the seminar in comparative politics, the course on “Analysis of Romanian political parties”, for senior undergraduate students, and the seminars “Basic concepts in political science” and “Political Science Paradigms”, for freshmen. Thus I had four different classes to reform.

I used this opportunity to develop a **sequential learning style**, understood as linking materials in the courses to fit together as a coherent

whole. Researchers like John Ishiyama⁵, and the ones from the American Political Science Association Task Force on Political Science⁶, underlined the positive impact of sequential learning on the learning of skills required of political science students. The result is the development of “building blocks of knowledge that lead to more sophisticated understanding and...leaps of the imagination and efforts at synthesis.”⁷ Students are accustomed during the introductory courses in the first year of study with the basic concepts that are later developed in more in-depth courses from the third and fourth years of study (Comparative Politics and Analysis of Romanian Political Parties).

Problems in developing new structures for courses

Apart from courses delivered by visiting professors from American or European universities, **students lack the exposure** to a totally different academic environment. In the recent years, graduates from these environments are returning and some of them start using different teaching methods and change the curricula. Yet, returning in a conservative academic field is not an easy task. Students do not have necessary skills for research and writing. During the last three years I observed that students tend to neglect the importance of developing the skills for research and essay writing (learning, in one single word) and value moreover the grades. They developed different strategies – the six evil geniuses of essay writing⁸ – for short-cutting the rational and analytical thinking, which of course is more costly, in short term, than these strategies.

Moreover, one of the problems that I had in mind when designing the courses was **plagiarism**. Students tend to ignore the negative implications of plagiarism, especially because there is a little importance given to this subject during their undergraduate studies. Apart from this, there are many structural reasons why students use plagiarism: in classes with over fifty students they tend to think like “there are too many final papers the

⁵ John Ishiyama, “Sequential or Flexible? The Impact of Differently Structured Political Science Majors on the Development of Student Reasoning”, in *PS: Political Science and Politics* Vol. 36, Issue January, 2003, pp. 83-86, *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, 1985, p. 24.

⁶ John C. Wahlke, “Liberal Learning and the Political Science Major: A Report to the Profession”, *PS: Political Science and Politics* Vol. 24, Issue 1, 2001, pp. 48- 60.

⁷ *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, 1985, p. 24.

⁸ Charles King, “Battling the Six Evil Geniuses of Essay Writing”, in *PS: Political Science and Politics*. Vol. 31. Issue March, 1998.

professor has to read, I will not get caught if plagiarizing”; lack of standard institutional punishments for plagiarizers; access to few bibliographical resources.

Still, it is not enough to mention the plagiarism problem in the syllabus and to announce severe punishments. It is necessary to **actively help students overcome the temptation** to use plagiarism. In my classes I help them by offering articles and books that they needed for essays, resources that are not accessible online for them (due to expensive subscriptions). As well, I put an accent in tutoring during the writing of their essays and final papers and in explaining why it is important to keep an intellectual honesty and resist the temptation of cheating yourself through plagiarism.

When developing the one-semester class of Comparative Politics I considered that students need to learn how to **think about political science comparatively**. Based on the concepts acquired as freshmen, students learn to apply these concepts in more in depth analysis and to link them to new concepts like outcomes of electoral systems, transition to democracy and political culture. Furthermore, in class discussions and the final papers, they are encouraged to compare Romania with cases from the region and from Europe. During classes, the discussions start from required readings that have different approaches on case studies and comparative analyses; and develop later on possible future analyses that apply to the Romanian case and East Central Europe.

The same method is used for the fourth year one semester course on Analysis of Romanian Political Parties: students are encouraged to think comparatively and pursue empirical analyses. However, the course follows a different strategy. During the first half of the semester we discuss in class the theoretical framework, using applied analyses presented in articles and books. They are accustomed with concepts like logic of coalition building, impact of electoral systems on political parties’ behaviour, political party organizational development and relationship between party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation. During the second half of the semester students present their research projects for the final paper. They use these discussions to improve their final papers and the methods of research.

For both courses students are asked to use empirical analyses and to apply what they have learned in the research methods course. As well, we discuss how to apply research methods to subjects covered in the two courses, and how to deal with data sets and other statistical information.

Students are accustomed during all the four classes I teach, with standard requirements, like active participation, final paper, and weekly position

papers on the required readings. These requirements aim to create the framework for the students to develop necessary writing and argumentation skills. To support communication and exchange of information and academic resources, outside the classes, I developed an **e-group** where students voluntarily register (about 60 per cent from each class register in this group). Apart from course related information, I use the e-group for online tutoring and academic ads: students and myself post information about different calls. The list proved efficient because the number of students applying to calls for applications, papers and conferences, increased each year.

What could be learned from this experience?

Implementing teaching methods learned in more mature political science academic fields, to an East Central European university, which is reforming and improving its curricula, is not always as smooth as one would expect. Students need to improve academic skills that were not important during their high-school education. Designing your courses requires not only preparing the course packs (required readings) and syllabus, but also **preparing the students to meet the academic writing and argumentation standards**. Here are some recommendations that proved efficient for my courses:

- use **sequential learning** in order to help students to acquire analytical skills
- **combine information oriented courses with applied analyses based classes**
- **active tutoring** and developing students' writing skills should go hand in hand with the course. Internet resources could be of important help.
- be as **strict as possible with the standards announced in the syllabus** (students tend to “negotiate” these requirements). Stick to the requirements; once you gave up applying them or part of them, you will have to deal with the snowball effect.

Argumentation

Luca Barani

Teaching by Other Means: The Semi-structured Seminar

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Teaching by Other Means: The Semi-structured Seminar

As a young university teacher, I would like to offer my experience concerning the following teaching problems: **how to structure a course, how to motivate the student, how to promote a satisfactory level of discussion**. In the first part, I will present the structure of one of my seminars. Subsequently, I will make some general remarks about motivating students. Finally, I will conclude by discussing the relevance of my teaching experience for the latter topic, under the three headings of argumentation, critical thinking, and synergy with the audience.

Structure

My teaching duties, at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, include a seminar of 10 sessions (x2 hours) per semester, taught to an audience of 12-15 mature students, attending a part-time program in International Politics. In terms of course structure, each session is divided into two parts: one hour of teaching in a small group and one hour of informal discussion. In the first hour, I provide the background on the general topic of that session. This allows me to ground this topic in the scientific literature and to give a common background to the discussion that follows.

In the second hour, the students are asked to present and defend their views and opinions on the specific topic, basing their arguments on two articles I distributed during the previous session. The articles are chosen to provide two different perspectives on the same topic, both grounded in empirical evidence and argued through critical reasoning, in so far as it is

possible. The students are encouraged to develop their positions, in order to reach the extreme consequences of their respective stances. The exchange between students is managed and mediated by the seminar leader. The teacher finishes up the discussion by summarizing the principal arguments developed by the students, as well as, attempting to synthesize the current state of the literature on the subject.

Commitment

As I have experienced in my own teaching, the single most important factor of the success of this kind of seminar is the **students' commitment**.⁹ In fact, the seminar format is based on the assumption that the student is not only a passive recipient, but an active and knowing subject, who studies political science in order to know and understand more about politics.

Yet, these expectations are not always met. Because of this, the **workload of readings for each session has to be carefully balanced** so as not to discourage people unaccustomed to weekly seminar assignments. In my own experience, a workable range is between 25 and 50 pages a week. In terms of content, the distributed material should be of interest to non-specialists. Abstract and theoretical articles, without links to case studies, are likely to discourage people and sidetrack them from analysis and discussion.¹⁰

In spite of these precautions, however, there are numerous students who do not have a strong appetite for discussion. With this in mind, some elements are worth being highlighted at the beginning of the course. Firstly, it is good practice to **make clear to the students, from the onset, that participation is essential** in a seminar course, and that the results will depend in equal measure on this participation as well as on the lecturer's teaching. They should not expect the teacher to do all the work. Secondly, the beginning of the seminar is a good moment to **set out the course's aims** and objectives. However, at the same time, it is useful to **ask for the students' point of view** and expectations of the course, leading to a **discussion** about this point. This is also an occasion to evaluate the kind of

⁹ Claudie Solar (ed.), *Le groupe en formation des adultes: comprendre pour mieux agir*, Bruxelles, De Boeck Université, 2001.

¹⁰ Philippe Maubant, *Pédagogues et pédagogies en formation d'adultes*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2004.

audience at hand. Especially in a seminar addressed to working adults¹¹, the contents have to be tailored to their backgrounds, which can be very different. This step is necessary in order to decide the degree of specialist jargon and the type of preliminary background to supply to the audience.

Level of discussion

In sum, I will try to demonstrate that my teaching experience with mature students, in spite of the peculiarities that this setting implies¹², is valuable in a more general sense. In fact, apart from the question of promoting motivation among a specific kind of student, I think that this teaching experience is relevant to general topics like informed argumentation, critical thinking, and synergy among students.

As for the first aspect, **providing a preliminary background at the beginning of each session** helps to assure an informed discussion on the topic addressed in the seminar. Equally important is the **concluding synthesis**, which conveys an additional amount of information and allows students to go further in the study of the subject. Ideally, the preparatory stages should ensure **a good discussion**, and the conclusions should be presented as an answer to the problems evoked by the discussion.

Concerning the second element, **the readings provide the students a double opportunity**. On the one hand, it constitutes an occasion to **analyze** good academic articles in depth. On the other hand, it is a chance to **study** them with a critical eye, in order to prepare a discussion.

Regarding the third question, the structured discussion involves the students in a debate concerning complex questions, where they are induced to accept other opinions and critically respond to them, in an informal context, under the guidance of the teacher. If the discussion proceeds without pressure from the teacher, but not necessarily in a coherent manner, this is a sign that the seminar is developing successfully.

Conclusion

The overall approach of my seminar is based on the principle that **students themselves have to be in charge of the debate**. One of the most difficult issues, however, is keeping the dynamic of the discussion within

¹¹ Peter Jarvis, *Adult education and lifelong learning: theory and practice*, 3rd edition, London, Routledge, 2004.

¹² Daniel Chartier, Etienne Bourgeois, Philippe Veyrunes, *Comment les adultes apprennent?* Paris, Harmattan, 2004.

the overall logic of the session, and at the same time maintaining an open space of expression without too much steering. This requires a very delicate balance between conflicting requirements.

In this point of view, the role of **the teacher** is situated between that of **an instructor and a guide**. On the one hand, he/she has to select an interesting topic for each session, one that can arouse a lively discussion. Moreover, he/she has to introduce the most essential information about the topic, to provide a common background, and to summarize the relevant conclusions. On the other hand, he/she has to ensure that the discussion develops in an orderly and logical manner and to point out the limits and possibilities of each position.

Originality

Eszter Simon

Role Play in Foreign Policy Analysis

Sophie Jacquot

(En)lightening a Course: The Intervention of External Contributors

Laurie Boussaguet

The File of Documents: A New Kind of Work for Students

Eszter Simon

Role Play in Foreign Policy Analysis

Using role-plays with a purpose

Role-play is especially original in raising the attention of students, because first, it presents an escape for students (and for professors) from the monotonous habit of frontal lecturing and second, within guided circumstances, it offers students **a challenge to use their originality**. Furthermore, role-play is also useful in taking the diversity of students' needs into account.

My experience demonstrates exactly that. My colleague and I used this technique during a Foreign Policy Analysis course: just a week before the start of the recent war in Iraq students were asked to "replay" the debate within the US administration and between the US and France and Germany over this issue. Our primary objective was to **bring the very theoretical content of the class closer to students**. We had tried this through assigning the application of theories to historical cases for reading but with little success: not only did students lack the historical details of these events, but case studies also failed to motivate them to learn the facts, which would have been essential to understand the theoretical implications.

Furthermore, we hoped that such a role-play could turn abstract in-class material into practical knowledge for our students that they could use in the course of their career. By and large students take this course for two reasons: they either picture themselves as future foreign policy makers or, having some general interest in current events, they take the class as the least bad choice offered by the department. For both groups, role-play could help improve their debating skills. For future foreign policy-makers, I find in-class debate as the best means to **personally experience actual policy debate** within a government and see the devices used in the public –

interstate – justification of a chosen policy alternative. As for the other students, we sought to reinforce their interest in current events and update their factual knowledge on such events (by requiring students to read the papers).

Role play in practice: 2003 US decision to fight in Iraq

We gave only minimal instructions to students: we divided the class (of 20) into groups, each of which was to carry the argument of one player. Grouping was made on a voluntary basis, or when it did not work, on the basis of seating in the classroom. Students – on an individual basis – were instructed to primarily acquaint themselves with the position of whom they were to represent. Similarly, the debate proceeded with the minimum number of rules: we first asked the representatives of the dominant US position to be exposed with a general argument. Then the floor was open to all participants with an implicit understanding that one must engage in a dialogue (give a chance to the other side to counter criticism).

In the course of the debate, students managed not only to recreate positions and structure them into an argument, but could also demonstrate their understanding subtle techniques of argumentation. For example, the real-life ineffectiveness/lack of influence of the dovish counterarguments of France and Germany were recreated by rhetorical means (so as the economic and military power balance did not have to figure in the argument): the two students who carried the hawkish position of the administration noticed the effectiveness of the Bush administration in defending its policies internationally by (1) comments starting with “we believe” which are difficult to counter, and (2) by claiming that they kept back the information about weapons of mass destruction (even from members of the administration) in Iraq because of national security reasons, which suggested that such evidence did exist (which does not appear to be true) and threatened the demanders of the evidence to be labelled unpatriotic or obstructers of American interests.

On our part, there was little need for intervention. Occasionally passive students were encouraged to participate by a general call for wider participation. Toward the end of the debate, my colleague interrupted the debate to correct several misconceptions and historical facts.

Reflections on classroom experience – results and problems

Leaving the classroom, students were still clarifying positions and analyzing the debate. This could be seen as a proof that we achieved our aim of **securing student interest** and that the more reflective students

intuitively could use the previously acquired theoretical knowledge so as to analyze the course. Moreover, some of the more passive students (with or without encouragement) were also participating more actively than otherwise. Role play can be a success with students, because **it brings decision-making close to students by actively involving them**: they need to apply their creativity and imagination to give life to facts and **transform information into an argument**. Moreover, it also appeals to students' competitiveness: they must bring the best argument in order to enhance or maintain their reputation among their peers.

Although role play appears better at involving students than any case studies, the acting out of current events is especially useful to grasp interest as they lack the "dustiness" of historical events: in our case students were concerned with an event whose outcome was somewhat in doubt (the real international debate was still in the making), and the event bore some relevance to their own life. Similarly, a current event takes place in the present international context that is more likely to be the context within which some of the students will have to think as policy makers. Thus, intuitively students could also learn something about the current balance of power and its effects.

However, we seem to have committed several mistakes that somewhat hindered us in capturing the imagination of students and fulfilling some of our aims. First, the intervention of my colleague to "**set the facts right**" had rather unfortunate effects: it inhibited students by making them aware that there was an authority in the classroom "who knows better." This tended to rivet attention on the opinion of my colleague, threatening the class to transform back into frontal teaching, that is, a lecture on the implications of a current event.

Second, we failed **to connect role-play to the theoretical content of the class**, which was our initial aim in introducing it. Therefore, when I will next have the opportunity to use role-play, I will certainly make some changes to this effect. Since this course always attracts plenty of students, some of them could be asked to be observers with the responsibility of trying to trace processes that particular theories call attention to. This, however, is only effective if it is discussed in class. It may also be useful to record the debate on videotape and ask students to apply theory to it later in class or in the form of a final paper. An in-class analysis of the debate could also contribute to achieve our secondary aim of developing debating skills. Pointing out the reasons of the failures of certain arguments could be directed to the discussion of how, for example, the "belief" and "secrecy" arguments in the above-mentioned role play could have been successfully countered.

Finally, I clearly recognize that debates over wars do not happen every day to use it as models for role-play. Yet, plenty of current events of large magnitude remain that, in general, could interest the vast majority of students. As the European Union is a practical reality of our everyday lives, intergovernmental conferences are strong cases for the same purpose. Not to mention that the playing out of past events still appears to be more advantageous than case studies of the same events, as the former brings debate alive, by directly engaging students in it. I must also acknowledge that I am still left with some questions. For example, how much guidance should be given? In other words, did things develop positively during my course, because the amount of instructions were adequate or as a result of pure luck? What are the weaknesses of role-play and how can the likelihood of its failure in class be minimized?

Sophie Jacquot

(En)lightening a Course: The Intervention of External Contributors

The context: the “traditional” organization of the course

Being a lecturer in political science since the beginning of the academic year at the *Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris* (IEP de Paris – Sciences Po) I teach European Studies to 2nd year undergraduates. The exact name of the course is “European Political System and European Politics”. It is a unit consisting of a lecture – given by MEP Jean-Louis Bourlanges – and of a methodology seminar each week. In each seminar, the lecturer has only 20 students, which enables us to get to know them quite well and helps to develop good working relationships.

The seminar is aimed at complementing the general lecture. Concretely, I have 14 sessions to help students that, for the large part, have no background at all in this field, to discover and understand the complex political system of the EU. In 28 hours we go in depth into European history, public policies, international relations, party and voting systems, current issues (Constitution, enlargement), etc. This quite intensive work is usually conducted through a series of exercises which are considered a tradition, even a right of passage at the IEP: 10 minute-oral presentations, essays, synopses, reading requirements, press reviews.

The objective: to energize and lighten the course

In order to enrich this set of teaching tools, I have tried to introduce another activity give another perspective to the knowledge the students

have to acquire so quickly, and to give them another vision of things, in a way, stepping aside for a moment. I organized two **presentations and discussions with two speakers**: one from the academic world and one from the professional world.

The first speaker was a **PhD. student working on lobbying at the European level**. The aim of this session was twofold: first, to complement the lecture and the seminar's work on this subject with a more scholarly perspective, introducing them to collective action theories and having them discuss on a more academic level than usual in this type of seminar. This was very interesting, because, contrary to the usual lecture, they were able to talk directly to the speaker, to ask questions, to ask for details or examples. The second objective was to give them a first glimpse of research and fieldwork, for I had asked the contributor to specifically tell the students about her field experience, interviews, etc. This proved also very interesting and the students show a lot of curiosity for this aspect of the lecture.

The second speaker was a French **civil servant working in the French Permanent Representation in Brussels**. I chose to schedule this address at the end of the semester so that it would help the students put all we had learnt into perspective, seeing how it is translated in the field. The contributor's presentation was based on the example of one specific Directive he had worked on for many months. He took the students through the path of the text from the writing to its vote and implementation. It enabled him to tackle various subjects such as bargaining, consensus building, and the mechanism of the co-decision procedure, majority voting and negotiations in the Council or the Commission leadership role. These were all subjects we had studied only abstractly. This experience, I think, was not only interesting and valuable because some of the students will later work in the French administration (as one of Sciences Po's missions is to train future civil servants), but also because it gave the students a new, living vision of the knowledge I try to pass on to them. This vision does not only depend solely on the mediation of the teacher or of the book.

This specific activity can only be a complement to the "traditional" functioning of the seminar and to the traditional exercises. However, the main aim, which I believe was reached, was to enrich the student's knowledge, to help them grasp something concrete in a complex subject. Perhaps, the fact that during these sessions with the speakers, the students that were more difficult to motivate asked more questions than usual, is proof of this limited achievement.

Laurie Boussaguet

The File of Documents: A New Kind of Work for Students

Teaching political science at the “Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris” (IEP) for two years I teach two courses: one of my classes is on political behaviour and attitudes while the other deals with “political power, from local to European level”. These classes are methodology seminars which depend on a lecture class and which aim at putting into practice what is said in the latter thanks to a series of assignments: oral presentations, essays, reading commentaries and “fiches techniques” (i.e. sort of short essays on specific topics). All these assignments are typical of the IEP, and students there get so used to them that these assignments become too repetitive in the end. That’s why I decided to introduce a new kind of activity into my classes to change a little.

How to bring originality...

Since last year, I have been asking my students, in addition to the other usual works, a “dossier de documents” (more or less a “**file of documents**”) or document review, which is original for two reasons. On the one hand, it is a collective work allowing students to get to know each other, as well as, to exchange their various experiences and knowledge in order to develop the subject. Students at the IEP come from varying backgrounds: previous years at IEP, international exchanges, universities, preparatory classes...

On the other hand, the exercise also aims at elaborating a synthetic work on a specific subject using only primary sources. I try and give them a feel

for and a first experience in empirical research. For instance, I explain to them that to do research on a trade union, one has to go to its headquarters in order to gather leaflets, official documents, posters, etc. and to meet militants. I want them to understand that it is not enough to read what other people have already written on the subject and that it is necessary to get out of libraries to face reality.

Concretely, at the beginning of the semester, they have to constitute groups and choose a subject related to the general theme of the lecture (an election, a particular institution, a lobby, a political party, an association, a specific group of actors, a media, a public event, etc.). Then, during the semester, they have to collect documents about this subject. Finally, they have to write a presentation of the different documents including commentaries about them, their connection to the theories and facts developed in the seminars, as well as a description of the difficulties encountered during the empirical research. They then have to present it in front of the other students in the last seminar.

... and to interest students

My students usually enjoy this work and can even be over enthusiastic about it. For example, last year one group of students decided to research a trade union, the CGT (*Confédération Générale du Travail*). They followed a group of militants for several weeks. They even took part in a demonstration on first of May against the reform of pension laws, taking pictures and picking up banners. This year, in order to research their subject, “the euro-sceptics inside the French political parties”, other students interviewed political actors and analysed electoral programmes.

IEP students evaluate their teachers at the end of each semester. Their comments up to now, lead to me conclude that this assignment was the one they enjoyed the most, partly because it is different from what they usually do, but also because, far from being completely out of context, it is rather an innovative way of tackling the theme of the class. In short, this document review is an unusual activity which contributes to making the course more interesting and brings added knowledge and experience to the students. As a PhD. researcher, I know that I would have appreciated doing this type of work during my schooling, in order to acquire a first hands-on experience in this field. Without saying that my classes have driven students towards vocations in research, it is interesting to note that in the last year, two of my students decided to apply for a master’s in political science.

Synergy

Lori Thorlakson
Originality and Synergy in the Classroom

Lori Thorlakson

Originality and Synergy in the Classroom - An experienced teacher's view

What is originality and synergy?

What is originality and synergy, and how can we develop it in the classroom? I propose that we can understand originality in a number of ways. Originality is a quality that we seek to develop in our undergraduate education as students progress from level 1 through to postgraduate qualification. Originality in the classroom can also be thought of as the **development of a capacity for *independent critical thought*** - so students take what they learn and think about it so it can be applied to new cases, so they learn more about the limits of its application. Originality can be understood in terms of the **methods and processes by which students learn** - novel forms of assignments and assessment that stretch students. Originality can be a quality of the teaching and course design. This includes using a different format - going beyond the traditional 'essay' - to use other formats such as the White Paper, briefing notes, newspaper article. Finally, originality can emphasize critical analysis of theories and academic debates.

Synergy occurs when there is an exchange of energy between teachers, sources, students' minds. This idea relates to 'adding value' in teaching. It is related to how students work together, and to how theory is linked to practice - how a subject is taught so students must work with theory and apply it, discover its limits. Synergy occurs during the linkage between receiving information (lecture, reading, discussion with each other) and contributing to debate and the store of knowledge.

Practical strategies for originality and synergy:

Creating ownership

In my experience, students perform best when they are interested in the subject or assignment, and they tend to become interested in the assignment when they feel they have a stake in it. I have tried different formats of giving students ownership of tasks:

In seminars, in a level 3 module on Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union, groups of two or three students are responsible for leading the seminar discussion each week. **The students are free to use any techniques they wish** - they can assign presentations to their classmates, pre-assign debate groups, create discussion groups on the day of the seminar, or provide presentations themselves. They are responsible for leading discussions.

In a module on Comparative European Politics, I assigned student groups with the task of compiling data on a group of countries for each week's topic. For example, a student assigned to compile a country profile of France would create a data sheet on French parties and elections during our week on electoral politics, information on legislative powers and stability during our week on legislatures, etc. The module is taught on a broadly comparative basis and the country profiles ensure that students learn about a few countries in depth. The students are free to divide the tasks among their group however they wish. At the end of the module they must submit their completed country portfolio.

Outcomes:

Students were initially excited by the country profile assignment. By the end of the year, however, several **students** told me that they **had wished the assignment was assessed** (so they could earn marks) rather than part of their tutorial duties.

Students who were asked to lead a seminar in my level three module were initially daunted by the idea (some asked during the first week why they weren't taught by lectures alone). By the end of the module, many reported that they felt they had learned a lot, but wished that the seminar had been assessed so that their hard work could have been rewarded. I ran the seminar in two groups. One of the groups developed a particularly good dynamic. Students participating in the seminars took their responsibilities of seminar preparation seriously, so that they did not let their classmates

down. Nobody wanted to stand in front of a seminar group and try to lead the session when nobody had prepared. The second group did not develop as productive a dynamic. Some students from this group reported at the end that they wished I had dealt more harshly with students who had not prepared.

All students were required to complete a self-assessment form at the end of each seminar, noting the success of the session, what went well, what didn't, and the extent of the student's own preparation. If I use this format again, I will make some amendments. These include **introducing assessment as an incentive**, even if it is a small component of the final mark (10 per cent). I would also ensure that students receive clear instructions about their responsibilities and require all seminar leaders to meet with me the week before, rather than allowing this to be optional.

Role playing and unusual assignments

I experimented with a different form of written assignment for the module Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union. Instead of a standard essay, which is usually narrowly focused on a single topic, I asked them to role play:

As an advisor to the European Council, they were asked to draft an update to the Laeken declaration, critically reflecting on the original aims and scope of the declaration.

As an advisor to the foreign ministry of a member state, they were to write a paper advising the government of the negotiating position they should take in discussions on the constitutional treaty.

As an advisor to either the European Commission or European Parliament, they were to write a paper advising those institutions of the position they should take on the constitutional treaty.

My aim was to create a **challenging assignment** that forced them to integrate topics from across the module. I wanted them to think about the ways in which the topics of the module were related, and how they had direct relevance to politics today. I wanted students to evaluate the theoretical explanations and normative arguments they have encountered throughout the module against the debates European leaders were currently engaged in.

Some students took their role very seriously, and presented papers with the emblem of the Swedish or Polish foreign ministry on the cover page. Even more impressively, they thoroughly researched their country's

position and demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the positions the government and parliamentary representatives had taken in the Constitutional convention.

The assignment allowed students to depart from the traditional essay format. This was also an experiment. Students become skilled at certain models of assessment. We see this in year one, where students struggle to make a transition from the memorize and reiterate model of learning that worked well for their A levels. In their university careers, students become skilled at writing traditional essays (1,500 or 3,000 words) and writing short essay answers on exams. The White Paper assignment permitted an altered format. I encouraged them to summarize their arguments with bullet points, and structure the paper as a government White Paper would be structured.

Outcomes:

This assignment had some clear benefits. It allowed students who had difficulty with traditional assignments to **demonstrate their strengths in different ways** (one student told me that he struggled with constructing fluent and coherent paragraphs in essays. He enjoyed this assignment because it rewarded the effective presentation of a concise argument). Secondly, it was directly linked to ongoing events, so students could see the relevance of what they were learning. The objective of the assignment made it difficult for students to uncritically repeat academic arguments. The students had a chance to 'break new ground' and reason for themselves. While this was a challenging assignment that students generally enjoyed, they also found it very difficult. They had to draw very broadly on a range of topics covered in the module, but many reported it was more enjoyable than a traditional essay because it was different. Providing clear instructions and advice was crucial. I spent more time advising students than I would in a typical essay situation.

What I might do differently:

I will use this type of assignment in the future in order to allow students to do something different and new, but I would give the students **clearer guidelines** and more detailed advice that they need in order to make it more successful. It may be a good idea to include a two-stage assignment if you are confronting students with a task they are completely unfamiliar with. The first stage could be a research report or initial outline that is due two or three weeks before the final assignment. It gives students a safety net, it gives you a chance to help guide students back on track. It is

confidence building.

Using primary sources

In my module on Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union, we regularly used the **treaties**, and the draft constitutional treaty, as a required reading. This has many benefits - it is readily available on the internet when library resources are otherwise sometimes strained, and it forces students to confront the “real world” developments of the European Union. The role-playing assignments also required students to use primary sources directly. I use an internet teaching platform, nicenet, for the class. I have collected links to the treaties and other sites. This makes it easier for the students to access the documents.

Outcomes:

I have used the word “forced” in the above paragraph deliberately! Students were very reluctant to read the treaties and related Convention documents. They were intimidated by them, and, with the exception of law students taking the module, found the *idea* of reading the treaties (or sections of them) almost unbelievable.

What I would do differently

In the future, I would introduce students to primary sources using carefully structured tasks. For example, I would ask them to read the protocol on the role of national parliaments attached to the treaty and use it to answer a set of questions that progress from descriptive, to interpretive, to requiring students to make normative assessments. As another example, I might provide students with electoral data and ask them to characterize the party system or calculate volatility. I would also introduce primary sources to students from the beginning of the module, so they become accustomed to working with them, and gradually develop their confidence with them. Students are also often very intimidated by numbers!

Synergy in group discussions

In my level two module on Politics and Society in Europe, my central challenge is to get students into the practice of contributing to class discussions, thinking critically about the ideas we are discussing. It is an important transition year, as students move from the lecture-dominated teaching style of level one modules, to the student-led seminar style of level 3 modules. Encouraging students to think critically about the material

and to apply it is another challenge of the transition year.

Student debates

One of my goals was to get students to debate issues. To achieve this, I pre-assigned students into three teams the week before the tutorial. One team had the task of presenting the case for the resolution (for example: 'Across Europe, constitutional courts have become too political. Discuss'), the second team had the task of presenting the opposition arguments. The third team was assigned the role of jury. Their role was to prepare for the debate by researching the topic so they were able to question both teams as well as critically assess the quality of the debate and pronounce one team the winner.

Benefits

The debate format worked surprisingly well. Again, giving students 'ownership' seemed to provide an incentive to perform better. The teams generally took their role seriously. I tried to give them very clear instructions - I provided a handout with the question and the instructions for each team the week in advance. I served as the time keeper. The stricter I was as a time keeper, the more professionally the students performed.

I also learned that it was important **to keep the atmosphere in tutorials 'supportive'**. Students are often afraid of presenting their ideas--they are afraid of being 'wrong'. It was helpful to create an atmosphere where students understood that the goal was to critique ideas in order to better understand them, and that asking questions and raising points, even if they were incomplete, was one way to do this.

What I would do differently

I learned that a strong performance in a debate in one week increased the chances of success in future debates because students had a successful model to follow. However, I also learned that variety in the tutorials was the best way to sustain participation. In a module of 10 tutorials, I would in future probably schedule three debates--giving each group a chance to serve in each of the three roles.

Conclusions

Originality allows students to do their best work. It is inspired by what most interests them. Many students want to **venture onto new territory** (students who adopted the position of an advisor to the foreign ministries

of Poland and Sweden, with great success, even though we had not examined those countries' positions in the class). Students need **encouragement, permission and guidance**. Encouragement through an interesting and relevant topic as well as inspiring examples to follow, permission through an assessment structure that rewards unconventional assignments, and guidance in the form of clear models or recommendations that many students need to give them the confidence to bring their creativity to their work.

Respect

Marta Daruřová
The One Who Wins the Students

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The other day I was chatting with students during a break and I told them that there would be more guest lecturers coming to lecture in the course and cover some specific topics. I expected excited looks but I got a different reaction. “Why don’t you teach us? We would prefer you taught us.” Needless to say I felt flattered. This brings me to a question of **what it is that makes a teacher accepted or respected**. Let me share a few thoughts.

I come from a family of teachers – both grandparents were teachers, my father and my Godmother are teachers, albeit teaching at different levels of education. And I have listened to many school stories about little victories over the students- winning the attention or even appreciation of the, generally, ungrateful student body. I remember my father telling us merrily how well his joke went down with the university students which he felt, made them listen better. Well, I suppose each of us runs “a public relations campaign” targeted at students to win their acceptance.

I suppose we can all relate to the feeling as a new teacher of standing before the students for the first time. Already youth becomes the first setback when striving for acceptance. And if one is not naturally assertive, then what can be helpful is good preparation, enthusiasm, awareness of the audience, and the language used.

A good lesson

Good preparation goes without saying. However, even with loads of material studied, it might feel difficult to fill in the time slot allocated for the session. I believe that it does not do any harm to repeat some details

from different points of view or in different contexts. Each point should be fully explained, and if there are any examples used they should also be fully exploited. The listeners should be given enough time to see what exactly the example illustrates. The good news is that this quickly changes with practice, and later on, one faces the opposite problem of fitting in everything necessary in such a short period of time.

Despite all the preparation, one can still field a question one is not prepared to answer. Then, it is only fair and correct to admit it and **promise to get the answer next time**. The important thing, obviously, is to keep the promise. This is how the students help the teacher continue his or her own education.

I find **a good lesson structure** very important. I suppose this comes from my secondary schooling when I admired the math teacher who had a very good system of sequencing the individual topics and explaining them. Students should always see what the teacher is trying to achieve and see the structure. This is something I would like to achieve: to have a clear message of the lecture and an outline for how to get through it.

Delivery

I believe it is important for a teacher to **be enthusiastic about the course or topic**, making it more special. When one conveys the message with just a little more than professionalism there is a greater chance that it will be remembered. And overall, that may stimulate the students to learn more about the topic and simply to learn more in general.

The teacher's enthusiasm brings certain dynamism to the classroom, and it may help stimulate class discussion. I think it is a little victory when students find themselves wanting to comment or ask something. I don't think that class discussion is always a comfortable situation for the teacher to handle. At least it is not easy for me. Nevertheless, it is necessary be open to other opinions and always try to understand what the students mean.

Teaching for teaching

Any topic goes down better if there is a link with one's previous experience or ambitions for the future. This can only be known if the teacher finds out more about the students either during the classes, breaks or office hours. Otherwise, there is a risk of teaching for the sake of teaching and not for the students.

At an adult teaching skills training course, we did an interesting exercise: The participants were divided into pairs where one played the role

of a teacher and the other of a student. They were given their tasks/roles separately. The students were supposed to define for themselves where they were from and think of their relation to dogs/cats. Hence, the students were from Mars, Asia or Slovakia and they had never heard of these animals, or considered them good food or kept them as pets. The teachers were given the simple task of explaining the differences between a dog and a cat. But try explaining this to a Martian, especially if you are not aware of the fact that you are facing one!

The aim of the exercise was to make us realize that it is important to **find out who the audience is**, what they know and what their needs are instead of teaching them what I want them to know. This is difficult to apply in practice, I understand that, and I don't have a simple solution. But I feel, that the more one knows about the students and their backgrounds and their previous experience, the better one can relate to it when presenting or discussing something.

I also teach in English and neither I nor my students are native speakers, and they have different educational backgrounds. Thus, I have become well aware of the choice of language to communicate my message. It must be **simple and sophisticated** at the same time. Simple enough to communicate, and sophisticated enough to be precise and maintain the scientific/academic level. When I studied EU law, I got used to a certain type of texts and a certain vocabulary. Now, I am studying political science texts and I realize again how important language is. Political science vocabulary is very different from the legal one. Therefore, I believe that the various concepts, relations and definitions are already complicated enough, and language (terminology) should not make them even more complicated, but should be as clear as possible.

Gabriela Gregušová

Conclusion: Strategies How to Better Teach Political Science

A concise handbook on how to succeed in the classroom

In participants' papers and discussions at the workshop, **three key challenges** faced by first-time University teachers in their teaching practice were identified. Namely, these challenges are **motivation of students, critical thinking, and original ways of teaching, all of which are intertwined**. Nevertheless, other problems were also vividly discussed. To summarize, during their short but rather dedicated teaching practice, the participants have succeeded in finding several efficient solutions to the teaching problems. Also valuable is their experience of what was not possible. Here is a brief and challenging summary according to the topics posed.

Motivation of students

There are various well-tried methods of motivating students. These methods relate to the factors which hinder students' participation in the courses. Firstly, there is **external motivation** which tries to break students' fear and stereotypes, for example by **fairy tales**. This way, students are made to listen and to be interested in the lesson. External motivation is good for a start but not for the whole course – it might happen that students remember only **jokes** and tales from the course.

Then **internal motivation** must come: that is, **enthusiasm for the subject itself**. This can be based on a new relationship between questions

and answers. Often, parts of the questions discussed in a lesson come from different centuries. Students may not understand the connections between them. Because of this, it is important that **students learn to pose their own questions** and to search for problems they are interested in. Students have to **rediscover the story behind the problems** and find the original motivation of thinkers they learn about and from.

What is also crucial is so-called cognitive resistance – **old concepts and prejudices** which are still in people's minds. The teacher has to **go beyond them**, both the students' and their own. To say it in another way, the **problems must appear very close to the students**. What particularly attracts students is that they might learn something that can help them explain today's world: for example, current political events in their home country. Students often choose their motherland as the preferred case study. This gets them involved.

Getting students personally involved also means **making them talk about their own experiences**, even in a course on international relations theory. For instance, for the term paper they might be required to argue all sides of the issue of their choosing and search out the different sources that back up what they are trying to argue. It is a big advantage when classes are very international. Sharing of students' own experiences then results in interesting dialogues and better understanding of books by Machiavelli or Morgenthau, which seem pretty complex for students at the beginning.

What has proved efficient for inspiring students is **getting them researching and thinking outside of the classroom**. This means, for example, asking them to bring in an article they think is relevant to that week's topic. In addition, students can be required to prepare a few discussion questions as well as explain and back up their own opinions. For instance, the week when they study the neorealist versus neoliberalist debate, a student can bring in a *Foreign Affairs* article written by the U.S. foreign minister.

Another recommendation is the use of **case studies**. Any difficult theory can become comprehensible when connecting it with current and important cases. For example, the teacher can link Morgenthau's six principles with various **wars in the former Yugoslavia** and the outside interventions by Europe and the U.S. It is much easier to go with students over what kinds of questions each theory asks using such a case and considering what kinds of challenges such cases present to theory. This can prove to be a really powerful teaching technique. Even the students who seem to sleep through all the previous classes increase their participation.

Some educators teach a type of course when students must learn to use some software or to work with some device. Then, the teacher can

experience **aversion on the part of students towards the technology**. Motivating students is, again, a major challenge. By this, **a degree of empathy can be a useful tool**. The teacher should emphasize that it's not necessarily difficult, just different. Moreover, it is appropriate to explain things in a **step-by-step** manner. A simple and straightforward approach works best.

However, it can always happen that **some students do not speak** in class **unless this contributes to the final grade**. Home assignments and case studies require supplementary library work, so they are avoided by students. Students continue to believe that getting an education is about performing well in assessment. In order to convince such students to learn, the teacher should **excessively emphasize assessment**, despite the fact that he/she thinks it is a step back. Also using the authority argument works – for example **telling students that this is a graduation examination subject**, and that not understanding its concepts makes them unable to understand further courses. Students then take the subject more seriously. Though, this does not exclude the importance of using active learning methods.

Critical thinking

When trying to inspire critical thinking by the students, the teacher's role is not to instil or criticize ideas, but to **focus on ways of argumentation** - how one identifies a thesis, how one supports it, how one takes it apart, how meticulous one needs to be. It is important to **balance a sympathetic reading with a critical one**, firstly by identifying the good points and only then, from that perspective, by criticizing shortcomings. Once a student begins formulating his/her own idea, the teacher needs to **be militantly supportive**, exclaiming “excellent point, yes, yes!” etc. After all, is it not truly exciting to see someone think independently?

In a discussion the **teacher should not disclose his/her idea until the very end**, if at all. Young students are prone to adopt the ideas of their teachers. On the other hand, argumentation for argumentation's sake, or pretending to hold a position just to provoke a student is an irresponsible behaviour bound to misguide students. When staging a debate it is useful **to have students send position papers to the teacher before the class** so that teacher can play their ideas against each other. Home assignments, consisting of writing short position papers, prepare the students to identify arguments for or against. It is also good to **show students some examples of outstanding essays**. That is because one learns much more from observing an example than from theoretical analysis.

What also helps when students are hindered in expressing critical ideas is to **drive students' attention towards comparing**. If they compare contending theories or apparently similar cases they are familiar with, it may be easier to identify the weak and the strong points of each theory. Moreover, it is good to **focus on familiar cases**, or **build hypothetical challenges** (“what if” situations), together with lots of follow-up questions. It can also be useful to offer **step-by-step examples** in order to guide the students towards thinking differently about the controversial issue. Finally, when building a seminar syllabus, it is good to **offer different perspectives** on the same issue by recommending contending or complementary reading materials.

A different level of students' participation in the discussion appears time and again as a problem. **Some students speak too much** and the other students do not have courage or space to express their different or critical views. There are two directions the teacher should follow: inhibit the “louds” and stimulate the “silents”. It can be done by **offering contrary perspectives to the arguments of those monopolizing discussions**. A second possibility is to **use verbal cues**, especially calling students by names; in order to drive the other students to say what they have to say. Another situation occurs when active students are driven exclusively by scholarly reasons in expressing their critiques, but they still remain very few. The teacher can decide to offer **consistent bonuses for particularly interesting comments**, perspectives, or critiques to indicated issues.

What is moreover efficient when motivating students is **using a combination of educational methods, lectures and seminars**, and a good co-ordination between these two. However, the teacher needs to **make clear from the outset** to the students **what the purpose of the lectures and of the seminars is**. The “forum of lecture” should be communicated by all the participants as a space of “knowledge transfer” and the “forum of seminar” as an opportunity of “knowledge production”. Students must understand that the seminar is not there to test the knowledge “transferred” through the lectures; it is not there to secure the knowledge gained through the requested readings; but it is there to open “new dimensions”. When the teacher makes these rules clear to the students, students manifest passion even for topics that educator himself/herself might find boring.

Unfortunately, it is not rare that students have **the problem with plagiarism**. Then it is not enough to mention the plagiarism problem in the syllabus and to announce severe punishments. It is necessary to actively help students overcome the temptation to plagiarise. One way is to **offer students articles and books that they need for essays and are not accessible online** for them mostly due to expensive subscriptions. During

the writing of their essays and final papers teacher should **keep explaining** why it is important to maintain an intellectual honesty and resist the temptation to cheat yourself through plagiarism.

Another useful tool can be an **e-group** where students voluntarily register. Its aim is to support communication and the exchange of information and academic resources, outside the classes. Apart from course related information, teacher can use the e-group for **online tutoring** and academic ads: educator and students post information about different calls, etc. The list results also in an increased number of students applying to calls for applications, papers and conferences.

Argumentation

The third problem inexperienced university teachers cope with is how to teach students to support ideas with clear and thorough arguments. The following advice can be given. Firstly, the **workload of readings for each session has to be carefully balanced**. Based on the experience of many teachers, a workable range seems to be between 25 and 50 pages a week. Besides, the distributed material should be of interest to non-specialists. **Abstract and theoretical articles, without links to case studies, are likely to discourage people**. Furthermore, in order to stimulate an informed discussion, **providing a preliminary background at the beginning** of each session helps. Equally important is the **concluding synthesis**, which conveys an additional amount of information and allows students to go further in the study of the subject. Ideally, the preparatory stages should ensure a good discussion, and the conclusions should be presented as an answer to the problems evoked by the discussion.

Originality

Both educators and students want lessons to be interesting, which often means that they must bring something very different from other courses. In this case, **role-play is especially original** in drawing the attention of students. However, the teacher can commit several mistakes that somewhat hinder students from trying role-play. Firstly, **the intervention of a teacher to “set the facts right”** can have rather unfortunate effects: it inhibits students by making them aware that there is an authority in the classroom “who knows better”. Secondly, the teacher can fail **to connect role-play to the theoretical content** of the class.

How to overcome these problems? One method is to **ask some of the students to be observers** with the responsibility of trying to trace processes that particular theories call attention to. It may also be useful to

record the debate on videotape and ask students to apply theory to it later in class or in the form of a final paper.

A **role play** can be also used as a **different form of written assignment**. For example, students shall write an essay as if they were advisors to the European Council, European Parliament or to the foreign ministry of a member state. They shall summarize their arguments with bullet points, and structure the paper as a government White Paper would be structured.

This method brings rather good results. Some students take their role very seriously, and present papers with, for example, the emblem of the Swedish foreign ministry on the cover page. Even more impressively, they thoroughly research their country's position and demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the positions the government or parliamentary representatives. This task allows **students who have difficulty with traditional assignments** to demonstrate their strengths in different ways (especially those who struggle with constructing fluent and coherent paragraphs in essays but like the effective presentation of a concise argument). Since the assignment is directly linked to ongoing events, students can **see the relevance of what they are learning**. Moreover, **students cannot just uncritically repeat academic arguments**. However, providing clear instructions and advice is crucial. Applying this method, the **teacher often spends more time advising** students than he/she would in a typical essay situation.

What is also really effective is **using primary sources**. For example, when studying the European Union, students can learn to regularly use the treaties as a required reading. The teacher can even use an internet teaching platform for the class where he/she has collected links to the treaties and other sites. The advantage of this system is that all sources are available on the internet. In addition, this method forces students to confront the "real world" developments.

To sum up, what mostly makes students fiery learners is a kind of unusual activity. Whereas most teachers base their seminar on reading texts and writing essays, why not **invite some professionals** and organize discussions with them? (It can be a lobbyist at the EU, a civil servant in Brussels, a young politician etc.). It is interesting for the students to meet somebody, especially from the professional world they could identify their future career with. On the other hand, they can much easier decide what they would not like to do after graduating. During the sessions with the speakers, the students that were more difficult to motivate often ask more questions than usual.

Another example of atypical activity can be a **compilation of the "file**

of documents". Students form groups and choose a subject related to the general theme of the lecture (an election, a particular institution, a lobby, a political party, an association, etc.). They have to collect documents about this subject and present it during the last seminar. Such files can be composed from a presentation of the different papers, commentaries about them, connection with theories and facts developed in the seminars, description of the difficulties encountered during the empirical research, etc. This activity gets students out of libraries and helps them to face reality. Students usually enjoy such work. They can even be over enthusiastic about it: some can follow a group of their interest or even take part in their demonstration.

Synergy

What more could a teacher wish than to conjure in the classroom an atmosphere of cooperation, where all the participants enrich each other's knowledge? To reach this goal, two practical strategies can be offered. Firstly, it is crucial to **create students' ownership of tasks**. For example, the teacher can **make** two or three **students responsible** for leading the seminar discussion each week. The students are then free to use any techniques they wish and they are also responsible for leading discussions. Or the teacher can assign student groups with some task for each week's topic. The students are free to divide the tasks among their group however they wish. At the end of the module they have to submit their completed portfolio as a group.

Experience with such methods shows that the results depend on the students in the group. Groups can develop a particularly good dynamic. Students take their responsibilities for seminar preparation seriously, so that they do not let their classmates down. Nobody wants to stand in front of a seminar group and try to lead the session when nobody had prepared. However, it can also happen that some students work much less than the others and than was expected. It has occurred that at the end of the semester some students reported that they wished the teacher had dealt more harshly with students who had not prepared.

Secondly, it is necessary to encourage **synergy in group discussions**. In order to get students to debate issues, the teacher can pre-assign students into several teams. One team has the task of presenting the case for the resolution; the second team has the task of presenting the opposition arguments. The third team is assigned the role of jury. The teams are defined the week before the tutorial so that students are able to get ready for the debate by researching the topic. They must be prepared to question both teams as well as critically assess the quality of the debate and

pronounce one team the winner.

The debate format works surprisingly well. Again, giving students “ownership” seems to provide an incentive to perform better. The teams generally take their role seriously. However, the teacher has to give students very clear instructions – for example to provide a handout with the questions and the instructions for each team the week in advance. He/she can serve as the timekeeper, too. What is interesting is that the strictness of the time keeper pushes the students to perform more professionally. It is also important to keep the atmosphere in tutorials “supportive”. Students are often afraid of presenting their ideas - they are afraid of being “wrong”. It is helpful that students understand that the goal is to critique ideas in order to better understand them, and that asking questions and raising points, even if they are incomplete, is one way to do this.

To sum up, **encouragement, permission, and guidance** of students are the right tools for reaching synergy during the lesson. Namely, giving students an interesting and relevant topic as well as inspiring examples to follow, an assessment structure that rewards unconventional assignments, and clear recommendations for creativity in students’ work.

Respect

Finally, when devoting much time and energy in order to be a qualified teacher, most educators would like to receive positive feedback from their students. Likewise, to be accepted and respected in the classroom is especially important for the young teachers who are often only slightly older than their students, and their authority cannot be based on age, even at the beginning.

There are several methods for becoming respected by students as a teacher. Firstly is **good preparation**. Each point made during the lesson should be **explained fully** and if there are any examples used they should also be entirely exploited. Furthermore, the listeners should be **given enough time** to see what the example exactly illustrates. Despite all preparation, it can still happen that there will come a question one is not ready to answer. Then it is only fair and correct to admit so, **promise to get the answer** next time and to keep the promise. It is also important to find out **who the audience is**, what they know and what their needs are instead of just knowing what the teacher wants them to know.

Other questions

During debate, workshop participants addressed several other problems, too. For example, the question of providing students with study materials

for each lesson, so called **class packs**. Class packs are usually prepared by the teacher when there is not enough material related to the topic in the library. However, first-time educators in Prague have had some negative experience when compiling class packs. Particularly, students are then **not pushed to be active enough**. In the discussion participants agreed on a proposal for how to solve this problem: to prepare a **set of web links** where students can find sources.

When debating preparations for the lesson another question emerged. Should a teacher **dictate** to students certain **questions** they should focus on in the texts they have to read? Experience shows that it is better not to give a set of questions, but **key points** in order to motivate students to search for their own questions.

When working with **more students in a group** than usual and still wanting to have a superior discussion, several ways were presented. The first idea is to **divide students** into small groups where they have an inner discussion and in the end of the lesson they present the result to the whole audience. Another possibility is to divide students into three groups, then two groups debate and the third are judges who assess the discussion and argumentation. However, it proves efficient for not more than three lessons; it becomes boring then.

The participants also agreed that it is good to **assess students during the term and not only at the end**. One way to do this is at the end of each lesson, or at least two times during the semester. In order to increase students' involvement in the assessment it might be positive to ask students at the end of the lesson to write down what have they learned that day.

Next workshop

I suppose that this experience of new university teachers, and also the advice of three practiced teachers, can help you our colleagues and first-time educators, to improve your teaching. Furthermore, I hope it can encourage you to stay in academia and seek new ways of better cooperation with your students and colleagues. As the Chinese scholar Liu Xiang (77 BC – 6 AD) said: “Man can have a large talent but without studying and consulting with others it is worthless”.

And I would like to encourage all who read this volume **to share experience** when applying some advice given. You can do it either by e-mail or by your participation at some of the following workshops. I do hope that the next workshops (the second in Paris 2005) shall attract new participants from universities all across Europe and shall enrich our educating knowledge and skills.

epsNet Workshop for Young University Teachers

Program

Participants: doctoral students – first-time university teachers

Venue: Prague, annual epsNet conference

CEFRES, Centre Français de Recherche en Sciences Sociales,
Vyšehradská 49

Date: Friday, June 18th 2004, 9.00 a.m. – 12.00 a.m.

Focus: sharing of experience with training undergraduate students in political science, discussing the problems, different approaches, purposes and motivation

Coordinator: Gabriela Gregušová, gabriela.gregusova@savba.sk

Topics of the workshop

- ❖ **Course structure:** How to elaborate a good course structure?
- ❖ **Motivation of students:** How to make students more active?
- ❖ **Critical thinking:** How to make students to think critically?
- ❖ **Argumentation:** How to reach a scholar level of the discussion during the lesson?
- ❖ **Essay writing:** How to teach students to write a good essay?
- ❖ **Originality:** Which unusual activities could make a course more interesting and what is more could bring extra knowledge and experience to the students?
- ❖ **Synergy:** How to create an atmosphere of cooperation where all the participants enrich each others knowledge?
- ❖ **Respect:** How to receive acceptance as a teacher?

Program

8.30: Registration of participants

9.00 – 10.00: Lectures of 3 experienced university teachers (20 minutes each)

Ms. Lori Thorlakson, University of Nottingham

Mr. Ladislav Kvasz, Comenius University Bratislava

Mr. Jan Vihan, Harvard University

15 minutes break

10.15 – 10.45: presentations of 4 contributions

10.45 – 11.45: discussion

11.45 – 12.00: conclusions

List of Contributors with Contacts

Andreas Antoniadis

London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom, teaching assistant
A.Antoniades@lse.ac.uk

Luca Barani

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium, teaching assistant,
lbarani@ulb.ac.be

Laurie Boussaguet

Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, France, teaching assistant
laurieboussaguet@hotmail.com

Marta Daruľová

Academia Istropolitana Nova, Bratislava, Slovakia, teaching assistant
darula@nextra.sk

Andrei Gheorghita

Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, teaching assistant
andrei@datmark.ro

Gabriela Gregušová

Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia, teaching assistant
gabriela.gregusova@fses.uniba.sk

Sophie Jacquot

Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, France, teaching assistant
sophiejacquot@ifrance.com

Ladislav Kvasz

Faculty of mathematics, physics, and informatics, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia, associate professor
ladislav.kvasz@fmph.uniba.sk

Liz Monaghan

The University of Nottingham, United Kingdom, teaching assistant
Liz.Monaghan@nottingham.ac.uk

Aurelian Muntean

National School of Political Studies and Public Administration
Bucharest, Romania, teaching assistant
amuntean@dial.kappa.ro

Elizabeth Sheppard

Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, France, teaching assistant
elizabeth.sheppard@wanadoo.fr

Eszter Simon

Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, Ph.D. candidate
pphisie01@phd.ceu.hu

Cristina Stanus

Department of Political Science, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania teaching assistant
CristinaStanus@home.ro

Lori Thorlakson

School of Politics, Nottingham University, United Kingdom, lecturer in European Politics,
Lori.Thorlakson@Nottingham.ac.uk

Jan Vihan

Charles University, Czech Republic, teaching assistant
Harvard University, USA, Ph.D. candidate
vihan@fas.harvard.edu

Other participants of Prague workshop

Claudiu Craciun, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania,

Anja Henning, Free University Berlin, Germany,

Tomáš Karásek, Charles University Prague, Czech Republic,

Aristea Markantoni, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom



European Political Science Network Publications

a) Books

1. Kazimierz Sobotka (ed.), ***Political Science and EU-Related Studies***, Lodz: European Institute, 2000, ISBN 83-86973-77-3
2. Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Ewa Kulesza and Annette Legutke (eds.), ***The State of Political Science in Central and Eastern Europe***, Berlin: Edition Sigma, 2002, ISBN 3-89404-216-8
3. Bob Reinalda and Ewa Kulesza, ***The Bologna Process. Harmonizing Europe's Higher Education. Including the Essential Original Texts***, Opladen and Bloomfield Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publishers, June 2005 ISBN 3-938094-39-7

b) epsNet Reports (ISSN 1762-696X)

1. Jean-Louis Quermonne (ed.), ***Political Science in Europe: Education, Co-operation, Prospect. Report on the State of the Discipline in Europe***, Paris: Thematic Network- Political Science, June 1996
2. Michael Goldsmith, Michael Laver, Max Kaase, Jean Leca and Michael Maclay, ***Political Science Today: Contributions to the TN Second Plenary Conference, Leiden, 1999***, Paris: Thematic Network-Political Science, January 2000
3. Michael Goldsmith, ***Teaching Introductory Political Science***, Paris: Thematic Network-Political Science, May 2000
4. Monique Leijenaar and Emiliano Grossman, ***Doing a PhD in Political Science in Europe: Information, Facts, Debate***, Paris: Thematic Network-Political Science, May 2000
5. Wolfgang Wessels, Ingo Linsenmann and Susanne Hägele, ***A Core Curriculum on European Integration Studies, Basic Assumptions and Proposals***, Paris: Thematic Network-Political Science, Paris, October 2000
6. Kalliope Agapiou-Josephides, ***Women in the Profession***, Paris: epsNet, September 2001
7. ***2002 Annual Conference and General Assembly Proceedings, Krakow, 24-25 May 2002***, Paris: epsNet, September 2002
8. Lori Thorlakson (ed.), ***Professional Practice in European Political Science***, Paris: epsNet, June 2003
9. Erkki Berndtson (ed.), ***Mobile Europe. Improving Faculty and Student Mobility Conditions in Europe***, Budapest: epsNet, June 2005 ISBN 963-86790-0-X

10. Michael Goldsmith (ed.), ***Doctoral Studies in Political Science – A European Comparison***, Budapest: epsNet, June 2005 ISBN 963-86790-1-8

c) epsNet Teaching Political Science Series (ISSN 1815-2457)

1. Gabriela Gregušová (ed.), ***How to Teach Political Science? The Experience of First-Time University Teachers***, Budapest, epsNet, June 2005 ISBN 963-218-399-1

d) Virtual Learning Units

1. Funda Tekin, ***Three Virtual EU E-learning Units. Unit 1: The European Convention and the IGC; Unit 2: The European Union as International Actor; Unit 3: The EU Institutions and Modes of Governance***, University of Cologne: Jean Monnet Chair Wolfgang Wessels, 2005 (available at www.epsNet.org and www.polis.uniroma2.it)

e) Electronic Journal Kiosk Plus

(ISSN 1762-3340 printed; ISSN 1815-2465 online)

Kiosk Plus: THE NET Journal of Political Science, with articles about epsNet projects (Features), the Profession, Teaching and Training, as well as Reviews, Open Forum, Nethesis, (the PhD students' platform) and Window. First issue (1/1): June 2003; second issue (1/2): November 2003; third issue (2/1): June 2004; fourth issue (3/1): June 2005

f) Other Electronic Publications

epsNet Kiosk (ISSN 1845-2090) provides members with information on upcoming conferences, seminars, job vacancies, fellowships and calls for papers

epsNet News, a regular Newsletter from the Secretariat General

g) Websites

www.epsNet.org: Also hosts the EPISTEME POLIS Project and the European Summer University (4-23 July 2005 at the University of Grenoble, France)

www.polis.uniroma2.it: for the POLIS EPISTEME Thematic Network – Enhancing Political Science Teaching Quality and Mobility in Europe



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“Gabriela Gregušová’s book on How to Teach Political Science? Experience of First-time University Teachers is meant to start a discussion of the problems involved with the ‘do-it-yourself’ concept. The book is refreshing to read. What is described in the various chapters will strike a chord in the minds of young and old teachers as well.”

Hans-Dieter Klingemann
President of the European Political Science Network

How to Teach Political Science? The Experience of First-time University Teachers is of interest to anyone who has taught or plans to teach at the university level. It discusses several issues that, sooner or later, every teacher must face: the motivation of students, the teaching of critical thinking and argumentation, originality, synergy, and respect. In their personal testimonies eleven first-time university teachers and three more seasoned professors answer such questions as:

- How to make students more active?
- How to make students to think critically?
- How to reach a scholar level of the discussion during the lesson?
- Which unusual activities could make a course more interesting and what is more could bring extra knowledge to the students?
- How to create an atmosphere of cooperation where all the participants enrich each others’ knowledge?
- How to receive acceptance as a teacher?

This volume is a result of the workshop that was organized by the European Political Science Network (epsNet) in June 2004 in Prague. It aspires to give help to those of us who have just stepped on the pass of becoming teachers of political science to be a competent, committed, esteemed and, above all, original teachers.