



TEACHING POLITICAL
SCIENCE SERIES No 2.

How to Teach Political Science?

The Experience of First-time University Teachers
Volume 2

Edited by
Gabriela Gregušová

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Gabriela Gregušová
Comenius University, Bratislava

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Foreword

This volume reports the proceedings of the second annual workshop for first-time university teachers, held in Paris in June 2005. It builds upon the success of the first workshop for beginning university teachers, held in Prague in June, 2004. Now, for the second time, Gabriela Gregušová has brought together doctoral students and experienced lecturers from Universities across Europe and lecturers, to share their experience of what works in the classroom, and what doesn't. Workshops such as these are vital to the discipline. They remind us that the excellence we achieve in political science research is limited if we do not couple this with excellence in the way we teach political science to our students - from undergraduates to doctoral students. In these workshops, the participants discussed ways of being an effective - and inspiring - teacher.

This workshop was funded by epsNet, the European Political Science Network. One of the key aims of epsNet is to promote professional development in European political science, particularly among its newest entrants. The POLIS project provided a grant that made the publication of this report possible. The 2005 workshop was generously hosted by Sciences-Po. I hope that the workshops for first-time university teachers will be an ongoing project for epsNet and continue to find new participants and partners in the future.

Lori Thorlakson
Member of the epsNet Executive Council

Nottingham, September 2005

Gabriela Gregušová

Introduction: Learning to Teach Political Science

Have you ever had a great teacher? Someone inspiring, knowing, and supportive, at whose lessons you have learned a lot? Maybe you have always dreamt about mastering teaching at that same level. Or you might feel a commitment to repay to younger students what somebody has given to you.

You might also have experienced another kind of teaching, however. And you find education at your university not meeting the needs of today's world, being based on memorizing and not enough encouragement of critical thinking and originality. You maybe dream of teaching in a different way, and helping to change the study environment. In all these cases, you most likely share with us the ambition of becoming a good teacher.

Despite your determination, you probably have faced some problems which lead you to think more about teaching. Would you welcome some guidance and encouragement? The aim of this book is to provide first-time university teachers of political science with the advice on the most frequent challenges which can occur by the daily teaching praxis at the undergraduate level. This book might also help inexperienced educators in other fields of social sciences.

EpsNet project

Since 2004, European Political Science Network (epsNet) has been organizing a workshop for first-time University teachers where educators from different universities meet and discuss the issues connected with teaching political science and related subjects. The first workshop took

place in 2004. Fifteen people from eight European Universities came to Prague in order to receive training from three experienced teachers. The training was followed by passionate discussion. As a result of the workshop, a volume, *How to Teach Political Science? The Experience of First-time University Teachers* was published containing participants' papers. The book covered the topics of the motivation of students, the teaching of critical thinking and argumentation, originality, synergy, and respect.

Inspired by the success of the first workshop, in June 2005 a second one took place in Paris. Twenty-nine of both first-time and experienced educators took part at this workshop. The meeting began with three lectures. Firstly, Mátyás Szabó from the Central European University in Budapest lectured on the problem of how to structure a course. Then, Karen Henderson from Leicester University spoke on the topic of how to teach a class composed of students from different countries. Finally, Martin Plesch from the Slovak Academy of Sciences gave a lecture on the difficulty for young teachers in dealing with problematic students and trying to achieve respect in the class. The follow-up discussion addressed many other issues as well, for instance differences in education all around Europe.

How did this volume arise?

Prior the workshop, the interested first-time university educators were asked to send a paper describing their experience with teaching. A small committee read all papers and fifteen authors of the most interesting papers were assigned financial support from epsNet to take part at the workshop. Their essays, together with the papers of the lecturers, are contained in this book.

Book structure

This volume is composed of 18 essays describing and analysing personal experience of the educators while teaching undergraduate students. When compared to the first volume, in this book not only new ideas on the previous topics but also new themes (teacher's mission, course structure, thesis supervision, teaching mature adults and plagiarism) can be found. The essays are written in clear and very concrete language and the style of writing is vivid, describing specific people and situations.

However, the book is also academic as the authors are referring to the literature they recommend as helpful when trying to improve the pedagogical skills. Readers of this book can consult these sources when

trying to find answers to additional questions from the practice of first-time university teachers or other issues arising in this volume.

The papers are divided into eight topics.

- **The role of the university teacher** (Simon Sorokos)
- **Course Structure** (Mátyás Szabó, Svetoslav Salkin, Kinga Kas)
- **Critical Thinking** (Matthieu Lietaert, Paul Petzschmann)
- **Essay writing** (Irina Mattová, Katsia Dryven, Sophie Enos-Attali)
- **Originality** (Tsveta Petrova, Patrycja Matusz Protasiewicz)
- **Specific teacher's tasks:** Supervising graduate thesis (Inga Ulnicane), Teaching students with working experience (Luca Barani)
- **Respect** (Martin Plesch, Agnieszka Weinar, Rimantė Budrytė)
- **Synergy** (Karen Henderson, Maria J. Garcia)

Future of the project

The results of the Paris workshop have encouraged the organizing team (Eszter Simon and me) to make the next event longer and structured into several short courses. In June 2006 during the epsNet annual conference in Budapest we would like to organize two days of training, mostly oriented on the question of motivating students and supervising bachelor and master thesis. The call for papers should be published in autumn 2005.

As the editor of this volume I would like to thank all the workshop participants for their excellent cooperation and moreover Bob Reinalda for his valuable comments on a draft of this report. I also thank Elizabeth Sheppard, Alex Lewis, Thomas Kwashie and Brian Green for English language corrections and Eszter Simon for making the book layout.

And I would like to invite you to read this book. At least virtually meet your colleagues from Belarus, United Kingdom, Hungary and many others, and read about their exciting adventures, mistakes as well as courage. Moreover, I would be really happy if you shared with us how successful were you when applying the advice given. You can do it by e-mail or at the best by participating at some of the future events.

The Role of the University Teacher

Simon Sorokos

Imparting Knowledge or Providing Entertainment?

Simon Sorokos

Imparting Knowledge or Providing Entertainment ?

*“To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born
is to remain always a child”*

Cicero

As university teachers, we should encourage our students to be critical and to ask questions. And we should not neglect to do this ourselves. It is now more than a hundred and fifty years since John Henry Newman (1896) wrote about ‘The Idea of a University’, and over fifty years since Clark Kerr (2001) commented on ‘The Uses of the University’ but we should never cease to ask ourselves ‘what is the university for?’ You may think this a rather strange and abstract manner in which to start a discussion on contemporary university teaching, but I suggest that we cannot make sense of our own roles within the university unless we have a clear idea of what we think university education should be about.

I propose that we have a stark choice. We must choose between university education as a product and university education as a process, university education as something that can be bought or university education as something that can only be experienced. This choice will have a profound effect on the way in which we undertake our teaching responsibilities.

Teaching in the modern university

I have little doubt that most of us would agree that teaching is neither easy nor straightforward. It is sometimes enjoyable, sometimes frustrating,

seldom predictable and always demanding. Learning is like this too. We should not pretend that it is not. To do so would be a disservice to us and to our students. Yet, very often, this is what the modern university wants us to do. We are all, unfortunately, sometimes complicit in this. We must tell our students what the outcomes of their courses will be before these courses have even begun. We must then make sure that those outcomes are achieved. We do this by producing lists of required readings and clear, measurable and achievable aims and objectives. We might even save our students the time and trouble of visiting the library by providing them with a pack of reading materials.

To the dismay of the university bureaucracy we cannot, as yet, do the reading for them. Should students deign to attend our seminars and tutorials, we must celebrate and revere their each and every utterance. It does not matter that their opinions may be entirely uninformed or based upon their own limited experiences. All views must be treated as valid. We must offer them an idiot's guide to essay writing and then mark their essays in a generous and understanding manner when they fail to heed the advice that we have preferred, pretending not to notice shoddy arguments, lazy presentation, poor spelling and bad grammar. And all the while we must keep our students entertained lest they do not enjoy our classes and fail to attend or, even worse, tell other students that our courses are not 'fun' and discourage them from taking these courses in the future. We must provide entertainment rather than knowledge; we must invite students to a cabaret rather than a symposium.

Perhaps I exaggerate a little, but I am sure that you are all familiar with at least some of the aspects of teaching that are mentioned above. Trends suggest that you may become even more familiar with them in years to come. If you doubt the validity of what I say, just take a glance at the call for papers for this very workshop. There you will find that we are asked to think of 'unusual activities' that 'could make a course more interesting' and to consider 'how to gain student-acceptance as a teacher'. Now, I am not for one moment suggesting that creativity has no role in the university, but I am suggesting that it should be utilised in the search for truth and knowledge rather than as a remedy for attention deficits.

One would hope that students were interested in our courses before they decided to take them, that they were interested in education before they arrived at the university, indeed, that this was there reason for coming. Similarly, one would hope that students have cause to respect their teachers, but should teachers, even young ones, actively court respect? Respect, if it is to mean anything, should be earned rather than sought. It should be encountered, not looked for. So, what should we as young university

teachers do about this? I suggest that we should begin by not subscribing to the idea that universities are businesses and that education is a product. In short, we should do what we can to reject the commercialisation and commoditization of higher education. Not only should we reject this, we should encourage our students to reject it too. This can be done in a number of ways.

What is to be done?

We should be honest with ourselves and with our students. We should tell them that learning is a challenge. We should inform them that the more they participate in university life, the more they will gain from it. We should suggest to them that there is no substitute for sustained engagement with the appropriate literature and that, with time, this becomes easier but remains rewarding. We should underline the fact that learning for its own sake is a worthwhile endeavour. We should highlight the individual transformations that education should bring about and we should not attempt to make our courses popular by suggesting that those who undertake them will be more employable in the 'jobs market'. This may be a happy outcome of their educational experiences, but it is not one that we should necessarily aim for.

Perhaps most importantly, we should recognise that not all individuals who are enrolled in university courses will agree with us or respond to our encouragement and prompting. It is of course desirable that there should be disagreement within the university. But this disagreement should involve participation and active argument. If we have been true to ourselves and to our vision of what university education should be then we should not shoulder the blame for those who do not share our vision, do not want to discuss it and do not want to participate in it. We must simply hope that others do recognise the validity of what we seek to do.

Conclusion

In my view, we have a duty to offer an authentic educational experience. If we do not offer this we betray those who do want to benefit, as we have benefited, from what the university has to offer. The university seminar room is a place for adults, not for children. We should treat those who enter it as equals. We should expect much from them and we should not be afraid to criticise, as well as applaud, what they have to say. Like Kant (Kant 1970) we must dare to know, we must consider that enlightenment is only available to the mature and we should encourage our students to do the same. Our aim must be to help our students inform, enlighten and enrich

themselves, but not in the financial sense! Unfortunately for university administrators, we cannot guarantee this outcome.

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Course Structure

Kinga Kas

The Undergraduate-riddle: Individual Work and Control

Mátyás Szabó

Student-centered Course Design

Svetoslav Salkin

Teaching a Small Group of Motivated Students

Kinga Kas

The Undergraduate-riddle: Individual Work and Control

As the title indicates, I would like to introduce problems related to undergraduate students' ability and willingness to perform independent and creative work on a regular basis, and also provoke thoughts on the teachers' responsibility to help with the recurring problems, including understanding the causes and building proactive strategies. But before diving into the subject, let us first see the parameters of those courses in which my experiences are rooted.

My teaching practice is mainly based on giving an undergraduate course on 'Comparative industrial relations and conflicts' at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest (ELTE). I had the opportunity to teach this course to graduate students as well, but the two experiences that I feel are absolutely necessary to share and discuss with the others present, are connected to my undergraduate students, or rather to the work we have done together.

Another important piece of information to be noted is that the number of students was always relatively small, a maximum of 10 people in the group, which is traditional in the case of elective courses. I would like to begin by confessing that I was rather pleased to have only a handful of students "under my wings" because I supposed the same thing that Light and Fox claim in their book on 'Learning and Teaching in Higher Education', namely that independent thinking is less risky in smaller groups (2001:127). And, as I have indicated in the title already, independent thinking and work are an important issue in this essay – and were of course a very important issue in my teaching as well. So let us delve into the depths of the subject.

Facing challenges

Independent work was required from the students in two ways: *a)* making a presentation of approx. 20 minutes during class (on texts, usually a chapter or an article, handed out at least two weeks before the presentation was due) and *b)* prepare for the final exam with the help of a textbook and notes taken during the course, summarising a semester's material. As the course advanced and the students faced one by one the task of making a presentation related to the subject of the week, gradually I grew aware of the fact that practically all of them had the same recurring difficulties with this task. In the following, I will try to assess my impressions of these difficulties, and their possible causes.

First, in many cases it appeared to be hard for the students to “convey the message” of the text, which in my view is rooted in two problems:

- The students fell into the well-known trap in which one believes to have understood and mastered the text up to the necessary level but in which upon arriving at the point of presenting it to others (either during an exam or in the frame of a presentation) one realises that not everything is as clear and well-structured as it had seemed in one's head before. This mistake often resulted in a rather chaotic presentation which was difficult to follow (which necessarily decreases the attention of the audience and consequently subdues the inspiration of the reader who feels the fading interest).
- The students also had problems seizing the essence of the text and building up the presentation according to the important trains of thought. Their presentation was usually very fragmented and emphasised many unnecessary details as well.

In Katz and Henry's book we can read an interview with a young teacher, Katherine Hope, who complains similar difficulties in connection with her students' ability to detect the essence of the readings (1988:138). She recalls a student calling her on the phone one night in a panic because she could not possibly read every word of every assignment and asking the professor to tell her which chapters and pages to concentrate on. Hope was however of the opinion that finding the essence is part of what you learn in college and refused to give the answer to the student. I am inclined to agree with the above-mentioned young teacher in her belief that one has to learn what to read and how to read.

Nevertheless, I chose an approach not of total refusal but of prior assistance, meaning that I indicate to the students what knowledge they were supposed to absorb and transfer regarding their actual work

(presentation of a text), but devoted one class reading to several texts (similar to those of their assignment) and tried to interpret them together as a group. This seemingly exerted a positive influence on their development in the field of text interpretation as well as critical thinking.

Second, the students apparently had problems with interpreting the text in a creative way, meaning when they succeeded in understanding the essence and conveying the message, they generally failed when I wanted them to put the new knowledge into a current context. Clearly the application of a theory in practical terms raised problems for them. Here I would like to refer to the Kolb-model as assessed in the work of Lovell-Troy and Eickmann (1992:127), in which they describe the cycle of the four processes that complete learning involves (or should involve). I have the impression that my students did not manage successfully to traverse the stages determined by the following processes:

1. Concrete experience (the learner receives personal, direct involvement with the material);
2. Reflective observation (the learner thinks about and reflects upon the personal experience from specific viewpoints);
3. Abstract conceptualisation (the learner draws logical conclusions or makes generalisations)
4. Active experimentation (the learner tests these generalisations and principles against some form of reality).

Kolb actually found that students majoring in social sciences such as political science and sociology tend to favour concrete experience more than students of natural sciences who proved to be more attracted to abstract conceptualisation. In my experience – corresponding to that of Kolb – my students had problems with any kind of process that involved abstract thinking. This also means, however, that active experimentation also became difficult for them, as they did not have clear principles to test.

It took me a semester to realise how I could help them – and myself as well, because teaching is tied to learning as Katz and Henry claim (1988:2). I tried to act as John Dewey (1933) formulated in his theory more than eighty years ago, suggesting that teachers should not only transmit their received knowledge but be aware and act in accordance with the learning capacity and motivation of their students.

In the light of this experience, I decided to apply another approach: instead of confronting them with theories, I brought concrete experiences into the course, meaning that we discussed actual events and developments that were similar to the content of those texts handed out for the

presentations. Then we tried to look at the issues from specific viewpoints and then form generalisations and principles. So I actually tried to teach them – by going through the complete learning circle, taking the processes one by one, in several selected issues – how to apply the processes on their own, so that by the time the time for their presentation arrived, they would be able to cope with their task without further assistance.

Third, aside from the content element, the majority of the students had difficulties concerning the formal, stylistic part of the presentation. They were usually very attached to the written material, repeated whole sentences instead of using their own words, even when the written text sounded odd spoken aloud. They hardly maintained eye contact with their fellow students but instead looked to their teacher while speaking. Altogether they seemed to treat this task as a reproduction of what they learned to their professor but not as an occasion to share and discuss ideas with their classmates.

Interpreting challenges

Now, after having highlighted the problems that came up regarding the presentation-issue, I will attempt to summarise the possible reasons behind them, at least those which I consider can be responsible for the above listed difficulties. I believe that these shortcomings can be attributed to two factors simultaneously: *a)* one is rooted in the Hungarian characteristics of public education; *b)* the other is related to university structure and traditions. Let us consider these two factors one by one.

Concerning the *first* factor of public education, as we are speaking of undergraduates freshly out of high school, it is probably not useless to consider with what background they arrive at the university level. I suppose that everyone is familiar with PISA 2000 (Programme for International Student Assessment) but perhaps not with its Hungarian results. The Hungarian experience showed results that were lower than the international average, and it has since been clearly stated in several articles and studies that Hungarian high-school students' ability to apply their theoretical knowledge (where theoretical knowledge has traditionally been well-based and high-levelled in international comparison) into practice or to put it into practical context is relatively weak. In other words, the passive knowledge is there but students have difficulty activating it and using it in real life.

The lack of active, applied knowledge is paralleled with the lack of rhetorical practice as well, which is also concomitant to the Prussian educational system and style (Hungary has traditionally been very much not Anglo-Saxon in this field, although there are several alternative schools

now on the education market). I think this background helps explain why students had trouble understanding the message, conveying it and putting the newly gained knowledge into practical context.

In my view the *second* factor responsible for the students' problems is rooted in the university structure and traditions. By structure I refer to the BA and MA system, whereas traditions relate to the attitude and expectations of professors towards their students. The two factors are interrelated in my opinion, since in Hungarian universities there has traditionally been no BA degree but from the beginning one worked toward a Master degree. This arrangement resulted in the lack of differentiation between undergraduate and graduate students, as well as regarding the treatment and teaching methods. In fact, when I speak of my own undergraduate and graduate students, I talk about it somewhat informally, since at the ELTE for instance there is no Bachelor degree in political science, the program is terminated by an MA in 4-5 years.

Thus, my undergraduates are students in their first or second year, while graduates are already in their third or fourth year. I believe it is not a very good decision to have the same attitude and the same expectations towards these two groups. In Hungarian terms this means that attitude and expectations required of the graduate level are required from everyone but the basis necessary to arrive at this level are not assured. The Bologna process has actually brought changes in this model by differentiating and clearly separating the two levels: bachelor and master, undergraduate and graduate (Reinalda and Kulesza 2005:9), but as the already quoted authors, Light and Fox say, social conventions can have a deep-rooted influence on our behaviour, both for teachers and students as well (2001: 131).

In my opinion much more emphasis should be put on teaching methodology, essay writing, rhetoric, and research planning etc. which will on the one hand produce ability and on the other hand reinforce willingness. This is clearly the teachers' task and responsibility incorporating this into their own course(s) where and when they judge it necessary.

As far as control is concerned, I would like to emphasise that in the present context I am using the word 'control' to mean 'supervise' and 'review', and not as 'limiting' a person or its activity. I feel it is important to make the distinction clear, especially if we think of negative references to the term 'control', as in the book of Weimer (1993:57) for example who deals among other themes with the subject of classroom discussion and the question of "how to lead and guide but not control and direct."

In my experience for undergraduates one semester proved to be too long a period to let pass without some sort of control of students' knowledge before the final exam date. At this stage it is probably a combined problem

of ability and willingness. The problems of ability we have seen above in my experience effect willingness as well, particularly since at the undergraduate level – many students are not sure about what field of political science they are interested in, and pick an elective course based on reasons other than personal interest (friends are going, comfortable schedule etc).

All in all, during the second half of my first course particularly at the first final exam I realised that no matter how many repetitions and discussions we had during class, regular written controls such as a short quiz every week or every second week, would have been very helpful for them to get a clear, structured picture of all they had learnt during the semester. The size of the material was simply too large and complex for them to be tested only once, at the end of the semester, in a written form. Again the problem arose. It seemed to me, that while they thought they had mastered the material, when it came to summarising it and producing clear thoughts and definitions, they were puzzled, because this time they were asked to activate their knowledge, and not only one part of it but a coherent structure.

Answering challenges

The question is of course how to handle the difficulties. Before I go into the details, I feel it is important to mention that throughout my teaching experience I have opted for theory Y climate in the classroom. It is a widely known theory, rooted in the book of McGregor (1960), which differentiates two approaches, two kinds of behaviour of teachers towards their students: in theory X teachers suppose that students have no willingness to learn, cannot be trusted and try to cheat. They therefore must not be allowed to take part in the design of their learning.

Theory Y on the contrary suggests that students do want to learn and try to do their best during the learning process. Of course these two definitions are – as it is often the case with definitions – pure and idealised versions that do not match reality in its complexity. In real life no approach can be all-X or all-Y, but one has to decide which theory one believes in and wants to apply in general. One has to find the right balance for optimal learning. So basically I followed theory Y during my courses because that is what I believe in. I share Biggs' opinion that motivation and climate set the stage for effective teaching (2003:67).

Here are the solutions that I chose and that seem to have worked.

- One week before their presentation the students were asked to submit a written outline of their presentation of no more than one page. Usually they later used this outline as support during the presentation – as was my intention – and not the text itself as they did before. From these outlines I could detect if they had succeeded in reaching the essence of the text and in structuring their interpretations and conclusions in a clear and logical way. Thanks to the practice that I described earlier in the essay – devoting a class to studying the processes of complete learning – they have cleared this hurdle without major problems in most of the cases. I also asked them to prepare a longer outline that was distributed in the class following the presentation, and used later as notes by the others, so the audience could pay more attention to the presentation itself. The two outlines helped the students learn to identify the essence and structure the subject along the main lines.
- They were asked to give their personal opinion about the given article or study that was the subject of their presentation, and also to try to relate it to a current issue (local or international), while the audience had the task each time of giving its opinion of the presentation, explaining its strengths and weaknesses.
- We started every class with a written quiz (with the student's name on it but not graded) about the subject of the previous class, and discussed the results at the following class. This way we had the opportunity to go through everything three times, and very importantly, once in a written form.
- I devoted the second class to introducing them to basic methodological, rhetorical, drafting/essay writing, focus finding, text-interpretation problems that I considered inevitably important in order for the course to advance smoothly. (During the first class I made an introduction to the three main fields of study on which the course is built: comparative study, industrial relations, conflict resolution).

After all, let me admit that in each case my students – at least the majority of them – were diligent, open to initiations and co-operative. I daresay that they mostly lived up to the expectations of theory Y. They learnt to live with the freedom of attendance, schedules and independent work but at the same time they needed supervision and confirmation as well. As a matter of fact, they seemed to be satisfied to be treated as what they actually were: undergraduate students- no longer high-school students and not yet graduates.

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Mátyás Szabó

Student-centered Course Design **- An experienced teacher's view**

Student-centred education largely refers to interactive teaching methods, classroom activities encouraging collaborative learning, and the teacher's efforts to create environments that help students learn more and better. In other words, it is mainly understood as a constant dialogue between teacher and students, a dialogue that is meant to facilitate students' learning and provide frequent feedback to students on their progress within a particular course.

A truly student-centred approach, however, starts with course design; a process that usually does not involve students or at least does not require students' presence, at least not in the same sense as teaching does (student-centeredness in fact starts with defining the basic principles of the whole system of higher education, but that is out of the individual teacher's sphere of influence).

In an influential article published in 1995 in *Change* magazine, Barr and Tagg contrasted two major sets of values and underlying principles in higher education (or more specifically in American undergraduate education), that of the *instruction* and *learning* paradigms (Barr and Tagg 1995). The two authors argued that a paradigm shift is needed in undergraduate education, whereby the university or college would cease to be an institution that exists to provide instruction, and would become an institution whose mission is to produce learning. The focus therefore, should be moving away from teaching and teachers to learning and students.

Although Barr and Tagg referred in their study to whole education systems, and not to individual courses, some of their arguments can be applied to individual courses as well. The question, then, is: what would a course fitting into the learning paradigm look like versus a course designed within the framework of the instruction paradigm? What can an individual professor – himself/herself being but a cog in the complex machine of the teacher-centred, instruction-based higher education - do with his/her individual course in order to advocate the learning paradigm?

Knowing your audience

A student-centred course design process would start with the teacher's attempt to map his/her course's audience. It means gathering information on students' entry level knowledge of the subject (what they know already, whether they have taken similar courses, how well they performed in related courses, etc.) their competence and level of intellectual development (ability to meet prerequisites, what academic skills they possess already, what those tasks that they can complete with ease are, etc.), their attitudes in the topics the teacher intends to cover (interest in or resistance towards various topics, prejudices, stereotypes), as well as priorities, long-term-goals and expectations (towards both content and methods).

This helps the designer of the course (or lecture, seminar for that matter) in selecting and structuring the content, choosing bibliography and readings, formulating learning outcomes, defining assessment methods, designing classroom activities and homework, etc. Gathering all this information about students can be done through a mini-survey based on a pre-course questionnaire submitted to students along with the draft syllabus during the zero-week of the semester or during students' course registration period.

A research article by Joan Stark published in 2000 in *Instructional Science* shows encouraging evidence of some teachers' student-centred approach in designing courses (Stark 2000). According to this thorough research carried out among teachers in several U.S. colleges, some 69 percent of respondents said they would consider student characteristics as a step in designing their courses, while an equally large proportion, 67 percent, would take into account how students learn when planning their courses.

Table 1. Steps college teachers take in planning courses

	Step taken (In percent)	Step taken first (In percent)
Select content	85	46
Consider student characteristics	69	15
Consider how students learn	67	9
Establish objectives based on own background	61	16
Select materials and activities	59	6
Examine previous student evaluations	42	1
Base objectives on external influences	35	6

Source: (Stark 2000)

Content selection

Selecting the content to be covered by the course is evidently the most important and first step any teacher would take in designing their courses. Besides demands set by departmental curriculum strategies (how the course fits into the degree program, how many credits it carries, etc), the “amount” of content, its level of difficulty and the structure of it should first and foremost depend on the students’ ability to be partners in exploring that content. Obviously the teacher needs to have clear ideas on what knowledge (both quantitatively and qualitatively), skills, abilities, attitudes etc. he/she wants to develop in students with the help of the chosen content and method, but he/she also needs to adjust the strategy of “pushing through” the aims of the course to the characteristics of the course’s audience.

Too much content-coverage (that does not take into consideration student’s workload), too fast or too slow pace, too superficial or too deep approaches would make students become alienated from the desired learning process, and would force them to be “selectively negligent.” This characteristic of students manifests itself when they realize that the burden put on them is too heavy and the amount of work required to meet the teacher’s expectation is too much. Students’ “survival” strategy is that they select – often randomly or based on non-academic criteria – a certain part of the content or task, and neglect the rest. (They read only part of the reading, focus only on some aspects of a problem, come to certain lectures and skip others, etc. – their selection criteria is often based on information they receive from previous year’s students).

The content (and readings) also needs to be available to students, needs to be clear and coherent, up-to-date and just at the level that is comfortably

challenging for students, and should not be used to show how much a teacher knows, or how much has been written in the field.

Aimes and learning outcomes

Not telling students what they are expected to learn, what skills they will be developing if taking a certain course, and what the purpose of each lecture, seminar, and assignment is, would leave them with the impression that they are the objects of teaching and not the subject of education. Formulating the aims of the course and the expected learning outcomes, however, should be done in a student-friendly manner. The emphasis should be on what students are expected to learn rather than what the teacher wants to teach (Ramsden 2003: 131). Telling students what “they should be able to do” helps them focus on, monitor and correct their own learning, self-assess their own professional development.

Despite the fact that there is a significant debate in higher education journals on the often “non-academic” purpose of learning outcomes (Hussey and Smith 2002) (the argument is that they are being demanded by administrators, quality controllers, outcomes assessors, employers, business firms, and all those who want to make university education a measurable, quantifiable enterprise, and turn students into customers), I believe students themselves find it useful if a teacher shows them their individual progress towards the achievement of the targeted learning outcomes since their enrolment in the class.

This can be done by assigning them a task at the beginning of the course and then again the same task at the end of it: more often than not the individual achievement is obvious, the results clearly show that the course has achieved its main learning outcomes (such an exercise would be to ask students at the very first class to define a concept, describe possible solutions to a problem, distinguish between two theories, etc. and then again ask them to do the same at the end of the semester).

As Barr and Tagg argued, such a student-centred approach to learning would also help fulfil a teaching evaluation based on outcome assessment, rather than on assessing the input variables (input variables are: yearly budgets, number of books in the library, teacher-students ratio, number of tenured faculty, number of books published yearly by faculty, etc.) In the learning paradigm an important indicator of the quality of education is how much each individual student has progressed between admission to the university and graduation on one hand, and how much the whole cohort of students has learnt since entering into the university, on the other.

Such a student- and students-centred evaluation would focus on measuring the “value-added” over the course of students' experience at the university. Some of the “elitist” universities have very high entry requirements imposed on incoming students, i.e. they get the best students who need very little input from faculty to be successful (they would probably be equally bright and successful even with less guidance from their institutions).

Structuring the content

Cutting up into pieces and then serving the content of the course to students in the most digestible – or why not most enjoyable – form is another important task of a course designer (this word-usage is in line with the metaphor of the syllabus being the menu of the course – including the appetizer or entrée, main courses, desserts and a short description of each meal's ingredients).

There are several ways of structuring the same content (Toohey 2000: 91-112). Some follow the logic of the subject being taught (chronology in case of a history course, scale of operations in case of an economics course, from local to global in case of an international relations course etc), or are based on key concepts (cognitive structures, for instance: hegemonies, revolutions, etc.). This logic is the one most often used by textbook writers and editors as well which is why many junior faculty members simply take the structure of a textbook and make it that of their own course – titles of chapters thus becoming topics of lectures and seminars.

Some teachers argue that the more academic structures, such as the ones described above, often do not contribute to the building of a dynamic learning environment. Starting the course with definitions and clarifying important concepts, will probably not increase undergraduate students' appetite for learning, and is not always good for classroom dynamics.

There are alternatives, some of which are maybe less conventional, but possibly more “user-friendly.” Starting the course with “the” most interesting or challenging issue that will be addressed during the semester is a good strategy to win students over.

Another example is the problem-based structure whereby the content is built in such way as to gradually “arm” students with the necessary knowledge and skills they need to solve a real-life problem (for instance, the course starts with the description of a case study, and by the end of the semester all possible ways to approach and solve that problem will have been discussed).

Another way of structuring the course is to first identify those topics (lectures, seminars) that represent the core of the course and then offer additional options: *remediation* (parts of the content that is offered to students who do not have the necessary background for any particular unit of the course), *enrichment* (for those who are ready to explore more a certain part of the course), and/or *choice* (special topics that satisfy particular student interests). Such a structure would make the individual course resemble a whole curriculum, with mandatory and optional parts, as well as special electives that would fill the gap in certain students' background knowledge. This approach would indeed "reward skilled and advanced students with speedy progress while enabling less prepared students the time they needed to actually master the material," as Barr and Tagg put it in their description of the learning paradigm. The research article quoted above (Stark 2000) again gives us ground for optimism in a student-centred content arrangement:

Table 2. Ways college teachers preferred to arrange content

Arrangement based on "very much like my own course"	Percent choosing
The way concepts of the field are organized	71
To help students learn	57
The way the knowledge is in the 'real world'	49
The way knowledge is created	33
To help students use knowledge	31
To help students clarify values	30
Students' vocational needs	20

Source: Stark 2000

Assignment and assessment

The etymology of the word assessment (*ad sedere* in Latin means "to sit beside") indicates to us how much student-centred the education is rooted in ancient times, and how far the meaning of the word has come since its inception. Assessment in mass higher education means everything but sitting down with each individual student and giving feedback on his/her development (graduate tutoring and supervising is now closest in meaning to the Latin *ad sedere*).

Nevertheless, assessment is still the area of course design where student-centeredness can be expressed in the most obvious way. How assignments are designed and applied, how a teacher defines and uses various assessment methods, and what criteria are used when grading assignments are all clear indications of a teacher's perception of learning in higher education.

Those who emphasize the role of the assessment as a means to classify students, to show what has not been learned, to be able to differentiate between good students and bad students, etc. do not necessarily consider assessment as a tool to promote student centeredness. The role of assessment in a learning-paradigm is to give relevant and constant feedback to the student on their progress, and therefore to measure not only the "end product" of students' learning, but also to monitor the process of learning.

Another element of assessment in this paradigm is that students would be given "credit" for relevant knowledge and skills regardless of how or where or when they learned them. In other words, their knowledge gathered and activities carried out before and outside the current coursework (obviously only if relevant to the course in question) can become part of their assessment. Student portfolios, projects, conference participation, etc. are all possible ways of assessing what a student knows on a certain subject.

The general trend in assessment can be best described as a gradual shift from exam to course work, from assessment that encourages competition to that encouraging collaboration, from implicit grading criteria to explicit ones (criteria and evidence of a "good" performance should be communicated to students), and from subjective judgment to objective ways of measuring knowledge, understanding and skills (Brown, Bull, and Pendlebury 1997: 13).

Assessment should also allow students to express their own critical thinking, therefore assessment methods measuring "divergent" knowledge (essays, reflection papers, individual proposals, etc.) should be preferred to those measuring convergent knowledge based on "right answers," e.g. multiple choice tests, traditional written exams (Biggs 2003: 159-160).

The teacher should also be aware that some assessment techniques are discriminatory against certain students. Time pressure and a stressful environment, for instance, can inhibit some student's thinking, while others are stimulated by such conditions. Some students prefer to express themselves in a written form, others within the framework of a discussion. A combination of various assessment methods therefore, is always recommended. Applying one single assessment method would only give a partial picture of a student's knowledge and understanding, a picture limited to a given space, time and circumstance.

The syllabus

The whole design process of a student-centred course should result in an equally student-centred syllabus (Grunert 1997). From the point of view of the students (and not that of colleagues in the field, top administrators, course evaluators, accreditation agencies, etc) a good syllabus should help them learn better by: showing the purpose of the course (why a student should bother to take it or to take it seriously), outlining how the course fits into what they know already, and how it is going to add to existing knowledge, helping students assess their readiness to take the course, showing them how they will become academically richer if they take the course, underlining what is important to pay attention to, defining what is required for successful course work, describing how learning is going to be assessed and the grading criteria.

The syllabus should include all the information that students need to know at the beginning of the course, and all the information that needs to be in written form, so that it can be consulted at any point in time during the semester.

The troubles and shortcomings of student-centeredness

One important shortcoming of the student-centred education (or the learning paradigm) is that the concept itself and its various interpretations have still been defined by teachers. Student-centred education is what teachers conceive to be student-centeredness, and in a way it summarizes what teachers believe to be beneficial to students (some students, for instance would disagree that assessment should be continuous rather than just a final exam, or that they should read outside the classroom, or that a syllabus should be long and detailed).

Second, in most cases of mass higher education one should rather talk about “students-centeredness” (in plural), as the focus of it is on the collective interests and needs of a class-load of students rather than on the individual student. Or, to put it differently, in the centre of the learning-paradigm is the abstract, non-existent student, who is the mathematical mean of a group of students.

Third, student-centred education should not be confused with student-led education, neither with students’ self-education. It is not identical with the teacher “giving up” his/her role and principles for the sake of teaching what students say they are interested in.

And finally, student-centeredness does not mean engaging in a cheap, non-academic discourse in order to be appealing to students, or to please the whole class in an entertaining manner.

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Svetoslav Salkin

Teaching a Small Group of Motivated students

This essay is based on my experience with teaching advanced undergraduate students a one-semester course on Public Choice at the Rajk László College for Advanced Studies. This is an exclusively student-run College within the Budapest university of Economic Sciences and Public Administration. I think this was a special experience in at least two aspects.

Firstly, the members of this College are extremely well motivated and knowledgeable. The existence of this unique institution depends entirely on the active involvement of the whole student body. Different committees deal with issues ranging from fund-raising and admissions of new members to course selection, academic standards, and final paper deadlines. Secondly, the course I was teaching was explicitly interdisciplinary and applied. Indeed Public Choice theory deals with topics at the intersection of Economics and Political Science and I was (initially) given a broad discretion about what to cover and how. My reflection thus will be structured around these two characteristics.

Students' motivation and requirements

The class consisted of five students with strong backgrounds in the social sciences, primarily economics, political science and business. All were hard working and actively participated in all discussions. This was something I expected. Still, an important problem occurred and caused some frustration in the beginning. It was the reading load. The approximately 40 pages of often quite dense material I planned for each week was too heavy for them.

Eventually, I reduced the weekly requirements to more manageable proportions. My experience affirms a common complaint I often hear about young lecturers that the requirements they have are simply impossible to meet given the fact that other courses are also rather demanding.

One of the solutions I came up with was to place more emphasis on the textbook treatment of some topics instead of requiring students to read the original texts, which reduced the number of pages to an average of 30. Thus, for example I replaced Olson's (1971) classic text with the relevant chapter in Shepsle and Bonchek (1997).

This brings me to another dilemma I faced, namely to what extent to rely on original texts? I believe it is important that students encounter ideas in the making. On the other hand, however, one should also strive for comprehensiveness and a good textbook may include not only a concise description of the major arguments of a book, but also cover a lot of the literature that followed. Probably this depends on the type of course one is teaching. The problem of collective action is just one of the topics in a standard Public Choice course, while a more focused class on, say, Interest Groups Politics may include the book itself or at least the relevant chapters.

A further problem I want to touch upon is managing class discussion. Fortunately, I did not have students who were constantly making relevant or irrelevant points, something I have witnessed all too often. In fact, we had very constructive and insightful conversations, which very often, I have to admit, put me right on a number of points. My role, thanks to the class members' initiative, was more of a 'facilitator' in a process of critical learning, rather than that of a 'transmitter' of facts (Brockbank and McGill 1998: chapter 3) that we so often encounter in the classroom.

The first negative consequence was that we never covered all the material we had to cover. Another was that we often entered fields I was not prepared to talk about. The solution to the latter problem was easy; I frankly admitted my ignorance and if possible I gave some relevant references. With respect to the former problem, however, it seems to me that discussion should be postponed till the last part of the class. That is, at least before one gains some teaching experience the rules of the game should be more rigid and questions should be raised only afterwards.

Finally, a few remarks on the topics for final papers: there was unanimous consent that writing a final paper is a better idea than, say, having a final test. I gave full freedom of choice of topics as long as they are related to what we have studied including the analytical tools that were covered. All five papers showed a clear ambition to be original and indeed some were. There were two unexpected problems, however. First, some of the papers analyzed problems with techniques not entirely adequate for

such problems. Thus the analytical methods studied in a course created a kind of bias whereby students tended to enthusiastically apply what they learned to areas that require different techniques.

In fact, that just reminded me what I was (and probably still am) myself doing all the time. The final output in my mind was positive though. The students in question became aware of the limits imposed by the methods one uses, learned the techniques very thoroughly because they tried them themselves, and, most importantly, started thinking about how to extend the framework.

The second problem occurred when a student chose a topic (or rather a field) he was not familiar with. His justification was that he just recently started reading about that field, got very enthusiastic about it and wanted to learn more. So writing a final paper, he argued, would serve as a good self-binding mechanism to do so. The paper did not turn out well and was barely accepted by the committee dealing with the quality of student's work. The student achieved his goal, i.e. learning more about his newly discovered favourite field of interest. However, I believe it was my mistake in not being restrictive enough with the choice of topics for final papers.

The selection of topics

I had prepared a detailed list of readings for each week, including many original journal papers, starting with the rudiments of rational choice and game theory and moving to the standard issues of voting, preference aggregation, collective action, Downsian competition etc. After a long discussion at our first meeting, however, it turned out that I had to change much of the material I planned to cover. All five students wanted to see more applications. The hot topics seemed to be corruption and interest group politics, which I gladly included in the course. Moreover, it was these applications that provided the bases for the choice of final paper topics.

Indeed during class discussions students were constantly questioning the assumptions of the authors or the adequacy of the analysis across time and space. In fact, without going into details, one of the best final papers was an extension of a theoretical model which was motivated by empirical considerations. (As it turned out the extension leads to rather messy technicalities which was probably the reason why it has not been made. Nevertheless, the experience was very instructive for both students and instructor!)

The negative side effect was that the course somehow lost its focus especially by the end of the semester. That brings me to a second dilemma: how to design a course that adequately covers the supposedly 'boring'

theoretical (or, in other contexts, historical) background of the field and, at the same time contains enough interesting applications. In hindsight I would say that a year-long course is necessary. Alternatively a ‘Topics on...’ type of course might be offered to students who already have adequate background. I suspect, however, that one can rarely choose.

Conclusion

As it inevitably happens, I learned a lot from teaching, not only about public choice, but also about how to teach. There is a couple of things I would change if I have to do such a course again, however, and one that I would not. First I would lower the course requirements. My impression was that all students worked really hard. But, writing position papers each week has just not been feasible. Writing, say, five position papers out of ten or twelve topics including questions for discussion seems to be quite reasonable yet still a demanding requirement.

Second, I would devote more time to discussion of final paper topics and would do that much earlier in the course. This is something that students are willing to postpone as much as possible. Holding a seminar to present ideas for final papers a month before the end of the semester would save much confusion and frustration. Finally, having more applications might affect the coherence of the course structure, but seems to be really motivating and, more importantly, stimulates independent work better than anything else.

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Critical Thinking

Matthieu Lietaert

Food for Thought: A Recipe for 'Critical Thinking' in Seminars

Paul Petzschmann

Teaching Politics Through Debate: The Oxford Tutorial

Matthieu Lietaert

Food for Thought: A Recipe for ‘Critical Thinking’ in Seminars

How can one think critically? Or more precisely, how can a group of students and their lecturer develop critical thinking? There is no straightforward answer to this question, but the objective of this paper is to develop a recipe, which would combine several ingredients: ‘stir-fried spicy’ students through seminar preparation, a ‘sweet and sour’ lecturer, a necessary time to let marinate and an online ‘food processor’ to mix the previous ingredients together. These four elements, I argue, can be useful basics for any cook (lecturer) to build a constructive environment fostering critical thinkers, in small groups seminars (max. 20-25 persons). Although the paper focuses on critical thinking, a clear link can be drawn with psychological motivation, argumentation, structure of seminars and synergy.

This paper is based, on the one hand, on some of the contributions in the volume from the first epsNet workshop for beginning university teachers (Gregušová 2005), and, on the other hand, on my own experience both as a lecturer, and mainly, as a student. It must be emphasised to the reader indeed that I have a very limited practice as teacher, and have never implemented this ‘recipe’ as lecturer myself.

The following arguments are, however, not a pure invention of my own but are adapted from a seminar on political and economic transformations in the Eastern Europe, which I attended as student at the European university Institute. Very satisfied by the structure of this seminar and its participatory dynamics, this paper consists of a written improvement on and adaptation of the lecturer’s method, which, I think, could be useful food for

thought. My assumption is that young lecturers should consider with great attention the massive database that they have accumulated as student, (often unconsciously) analysing their lecturers' teachings: a young lecturer does not start teaching from scratch!

Cooking ingredients

'Stir-fried' students' spicy ideas

From what I read in last year contributions, the accent was often put on student participation. Writing about motivation, Cristina Stanus stated that 'active learning' or 'in-class presentation' turned out to be very useful and that, ironically, students enjoyed the lecture more when she did not lecture (Stanus 2005: 14). Although I agree with the idea, it must be stressed that presentations tend often to be very long and, as a result of this, the audience tends to lose its concentration and the dynamism of the whole group can disappear. In other words, what matters to foster critical thinking is not so much a 'one-person presentation', but 'group interaction' or debate. 'Active learning' really starts when students interact with each other on a similar subject.

Therefore, and to stress the 'active' part, it is fundamental that students, and above all the lecturer (see next section), know the material on which critique must be built. Here the concept of time becomes relevant. In fact, human beings take time to digest information, and complex university readings require without a doubt much more time. An important seminar's requirement thus is that students are asked to write short summaries of the weekly readings, as well as to express comments and questions they would like to discuss in the seminar. Links with previous week seminars are always encouraged. This summary should be sent to the lecturer about 48 hours before the beginning of the seminar so that the lecturer can send an e-mail back to the students with *all* the questions he/she received. Each student gets then 48 hours to pick up one or two questions and prepare potential answers. Time is important because, very rarely, critiques will emerge out of a quick reading before the seminar. On the contrary, when students are asked to take time to 'stir-fry' their ideas before the debate, their brain can digest the information at its own pace and it is more likely they'll come up with spicy critiques.

'Sweet and sour' lecturer

Luca Barani wrote in last year's contribution that '*the single most important factor* of the success of this kind of seminar is the students'

commitments' (my emphasis, Barani 2005: 37). No one questions that student participation is key, but I would add that Barani only tells half of the story and this could lead to avoiding the very important role of the lecturer. First, the lecturer is the 'seminar referee' in the sense he/she has the monopoly on building the seminar structure, or the rules of the game. An important idea behind the 'referee' is that the lecturer must play a role in 'erasing him/herself from the playing field'. Quoting again Cristina Stanus "they like me better if I don't lecture", the lecturer must be able not to monopolise the lecture, but to ensure a clear understanding by all and not only by some, to foster efforts towards argumentation, synergy, respect, and critical thinking.

Second, Barani's claim creates a clear-cut boundary between the lecturer and the students, and this can lead to insulate the lecturer who 'knows' from any kind of responsibility. Instead of this, I would suggest the lecturer pay ongoing careful attention to stimulate the critical thinking of students. Some students might be able to skip steps and be very critical without the help of the lecturer. Others, on the contrary, could be slower due to some problems (affective, understanding...) and it is the duty of the lecturer to understand the reasons why some students might not fulfil the requirements.

Third, and borrowing from Jan Vihan's idea of 'militantly supportive' lecturer who should encourage students and tell them "Excellent point, yes, yes!" (Vihan 2005: 23). I would like to add the word 'However...' at the end of his sentence as I think it is fundamental to go beyond simply instilling confidence in the student, but also forcing him/her to build further argumentation. In other words, the lecturer should play a kind of 'sweet and sour' game: on one hand, he/she must play the devil's advocate. Thus when a student presents an argument, the lecturer's role is to develop a counter argument in order to launch a debate with the student(s).

The aim here is clearly to develop argumentation and critique. On the other hand, the lecturer must stimulate confidence and show them that they are entering a 'playing field' of argumentation rather than a 'battle field'. Here notions of psychology become very much important, as the playing context helps students to feel more relaxed regarding critical thinking. In fact, in an exercise in 'critical thinking', which might at first appear scary, students relax and start playing without any fear of "saying something wrong." A professor told me once 'no one can think freely when feeling locked in a jail', and creating a game-like atmosphere can help students overcome this.

Let it marinate for a while...

An important cook's tip: allow the whole dish to marinate a little. As I already said, critical thinking does not occur overnight. Nor does it only occur in academia. In one person's life, different kinds of critical thinking do emerge over time in different fields (emotional, art, manual, sport...). Critical thinking at university is very specific in itself because one enters the university in order to build a critical mind.

Contrary to the general school system where pupils are mainly asked to repeat and apply what the teacher teaches, university learning requires building links among different elements in order to create new knowledge, to go beyond what already exists. In short, this requires time and preparation. Only few (if any!) have had the privilege to behave as lazy geniuses whereas millions have been hard working persons. Information must be found, must be read, must be digested and then, perhaps, with time, critical thinking can be fruitful. This is a fundamental fact that any lecturer should bear in mind and make explicit to the audience so that students do not fear "saying something wrong" but understand that a good critique always follows many trials and errors.

Mix the ingredients with an online food processor

Before concluding a last word should be added on what new technologies of communication, mainly internet, can bring to the preparation of a seminar. I would like to concentrate not so much on the use of particular and useful programmes, but rather on the use of emails and e-forum. E-mails, as I said above, are very constructive tools: students can send their weekly summaries and questions to the lecturer before the start of the seminar.

Although being similar to Vihan's suggestion (Vihan 2005: 24), it also goes beyond. Whereas Vihan sees a one-way-road from the students to the lecturer, the main idea in my view is the process of feedback. In fact, students send their questions about the weekly readings; these are gathered and, perhaps made clearer, by the lecturer who sends them *all* back to each student so that they can pick up one or two questions and prepare potential answers. This, I argue, can be very useful for the dynamism of the debate as participants' argumentation would be more prepared. The role of the e-forum should also be pointed out as it opens new spaces of interaction and thinking *after* the lecture. This can be practical in case students did not understand a topic, or in case some want to further develop an argument.

Dinner is ready!

That's it! This should be a good start for dynamic and constructive seminar debates. As I said, this is just a basic recipe, which any good cook would adapt to his/her own experience and taste. But, I think the four main elements ('stir fried' spicy students, 'sweet and sour' lecturers, the marinade and the online food processor) are fundamental to help one answer the question asked in the introduction: how can a group of students (lecturer included) develop their critical thinking?

Although this paper focused on the critical thinking aspect, I would like to emphasize now that reaching this aim requires fostering students' motivation, group synergy and careful argumentation. All four aims overlap each other. First, individual motivation is fundamental to thinking critically, and the role of the lecturer will be decisive in encouraging confidence and in understanding the existence of potential problems. Communication skills should clearly not be overlooked.

Second, critical thinking might appear as an individual process but it rarely is. By definition, being critical emerges from what others did. Again, the ability of the lecturer to create a 'game-like atmosphere' in order to reach a common goal should help students create their own 'team-spirit', which is fundamental for any kind of synergy to emerge. Finally, critical thinking cannot exist without a careful argumentation by the student and, therefore, good knowledge of existing literature and step-by-step argumentation play a central part. Again, the lecturer can play a crucial role by guiding them onto the right track (e.g. selection of readings).

Enjoy your seminar! And let us know in case you add new ingredients or create your own recipe!

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Paul Petzschmann

Teaching Politics through Debate: The Oxford Tutorial

The tutorial system of undergraduate teaching as practiced in the United Kingdom, and especially within the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, is seen as a unique and somewhat anachronistic feature. It embodies, in the words of one commentator, the “traditional assumptions about academic intimacy ... which seems out of place in a ... mass system of Higher Education” (Scott 2001:194). Conceived at a time when there were few constraints on the teaching profession and no pressures from research ratings and government funding bodies, the Oxford tutorial is often represented as a hang-over from a mystical ‘golden age’ of liberal education.

The symbolism of tutorial teaching

Today’s educators work in a very different environment. Mass access to higher education has led to rapidly worsening teacher-student ratios while research assessments have placed more time pressures on university staff. Oxford University has managed to soften and delay the impact of these developments, although it will not be able to escape them. Financial pressures on the university have sparked a debate about the value of the tutorial system and whether it can still play a role in modern undergraduate education despite its considerable financial and administrative costs.

This debate also highlights some fault-lines in an ongoing cultural struggle about the purpose of higher education more generally. Opposition to the tutorial system is often associated with a “managerial” approach to

education. Education is not conceived of as an end in itself but is subservient to a variety of external purposes, such as strengthening the national economy through applied research, furthering social inclusion and mobility and providing vocational training.

Supporters of a more traditional approach to education, understood as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, think of the tutorial model of teaching often in terms of a symbol of scholarly independence. Scholars are free to devote themselves to research without external interference and the nurturing of academic talent on an individual basis is part of the professional ethos. Not only does managerialism violate scholarly independence but it also interferes with the personal relationship between teacher and student.

What is tutorial teaching

The history of the Oxford tutorial goes back to the early 1700s. Several manuals for use by students and their instructors recommend both the reading of set texts on classics, mathematics and philosophy. From the mid-century onwards there are reports of regular essays being prepared by students for discussion with their tutors (Cambridge History of English and American Literature 1907-1921: 36). What were initially irregular and private meetings between scholars and interested students slowly evolved into a more formal system of instruction. For each course, or “paper” a student would be assigned a scholar with expertise in the subject who would arrange a series of weekly meetings throughout the duration of the academic period. For each of these meetings the student would have to prepare a piece of work, usually an essay on a specific question, a literature review or set of problems which would then form the basis for a thorough discussion with the tutor. With some alterations, this model survives to this day at Oxford.

An ideal scenario

The introduction of the social sciences into the higher education curriculum has led to some deviation from this standard format. Politics, for example, knows an extremely wide variety of sub-fields and specializations, ranging from the study of international relations, voting behaviour and revolutions to the more rarefied question of political theory and intellectual history. Introducing undergraduate students to the study of politics therefore requires a thorough grounding in a range of complex and abstract concepts, vocabularies and methodologies. At the same time political science makes the claim of producing genuine political knowledge

with a practical intent. The personal interests of students studying the subject are therefore diverse.

I have found the tutorial to be a very useful teaching method in doing justice to this diversity of interests. The tutorial tackles very successfully the motivational problems some students may be facing because it allows the instructor to tailor a session according to the student's interest. This can be very helpful, especially during the sometimes tedious stage at which students are grappling with set texts in political theory.

In addition, the tutorial puts considerable pressure on the student to do the necessary preparatory work. In a tutorial, there is no place to hide. Knowing that every idea is subjected to critical scrutiny by the tutor and that silence is not an option, students do not only engage the set text or question, but are also more likely to read their way around the subject. The tutorial provides a good context for the comparative exploration of different methodologies in political research. Given that students are forced to get to grips with the information prior to the meeting, the discussion is infinitely more fruitful in exploring different avenues and for assessing methods and concepts comparatively.

What needs to hold in order for a statement to be true? Questions like these force students to explore the assumptions underlying political statements, to assess them in light of available evidence and consider them in specific contexts. Not only does this keep students on their feet, but they also need to make their thought processes transparent to their interlocutor, "think aloud" which is a useful step in learning how to structure an argument (Smith and Clark 2001).

The tutorial makes students write early and often, thus getting them to actively engage the material as well as presenting their thoughts on a subject in a coherent fashion. The aim of the tutorial essay is the critical interrogation of a problem by way of an argument, usually in answer to a specific question. The follow-up discussion allows for the possibility of questioning underlying premises and of exploring alternatives. The best tutorials do not only leave the student with a firm grasp of the different literatures relating to a specific concept or problem, but they will also be able to distinguish between the different methodological perspectives that each type of literature is based on. Most importantly, students will have learnt to decide what approach to apply most meaningfully to a specific problem. This does not only make for good exam answers but also serves as a valuable introduction to research.

A reality check

What I have outlined above is of course an ideal scenario, more a dream than reality. The success of a tutorial is premised on the assumption that teacher and student are able to engage on an equal footing. Critics argue that in order for this to be the case academics and their students need to share a variety of background assumptions and experiences. At times of increasing social and geographical diversity in higher education the retention of such an ideal may be neither practicable nor desirable. Furthermore, the practical problems presented by the contemporary academic environment as outlined above should lead us to question the feasibility of applying this teaching method across the board.

Most universities in the United Kingdom can just about manage 15-25 students per class. Although this might compare favourably with the conditions at universities on the continent, it means that the opportunity to regularly present and discuss their own work is a remote possibility rather than a reality for most students. I nevertheless believe that basic features of the tutorial system cannot only be preserved under current conditions but can be used to supplement the teaching styles already at our disposal. We need to remember that even under ideal conditions the tutorial never functions as the sole teaching method. It is meant to deepen understanding gained in the course of lectures, seminars and through self-study. It can therefore only work in a situation where students have learnt how to study for themselves.

Mixing up teaching styles

But once this has been accomplished a tutorial can work equally well in a class-based teaching environment. Instead of offering a weekly seminar for an entire class it is possible to arrange biweekly tutorials with a smaller group of students giving them the opportunity to present pieces of work for in-depth discussion. A tutorial-style approach does not only work in a one-on-one setting. On the contrary, having two or three more students can enliven the discussion and contribute to a discussion that sustains itself without outside intervention. This is the kind of dynamic that one can observe in good graduate seminars. In order to make it work for undergraduates one needs to work with smaller groups and provide more leadership and guidance.

The smaller size of the tutorial can also contribute to lowering student's resistance to active participation. A tutorial element based on less frequent but high-quality sessions not only increases students overall output of written work. It also promotes a deep approach to learning as opposed to

the superficial engagement that is often the result of a high quantity of low-impact seminars (Säljö 1978). Another possibility for including a tutorial element would be the creation of a tutorial setting with individual students or groups of students parallel to a seminar while the group at large is engaged in another task.

Challenging students

I am aware that these suggestions leave many questions unanswered but remain convinced that the flexibility that has allowed the tutorial to survive might at Oxford also make this teaching style attractive in other settings. Ultimately, the question of preserving elements of individual interaction with students in systems of mass higher education forces us to confront difficult problems of an entirely different order. Do we believe in stretching students by way of challenging their preconceptions? Do we want to encourage independent thought instead of spoon-feeding them information? Do we want to make politics education political by encouraging vigorous debating and exchange?

In the current climate of marketisation in higher education one often comes across phrases such as “the student customer”, or exhortations to “encourage diversity in individual learning styles” and to “accommodate individual learning styles” by making course contents “student-friendly.” Stretching and challenging students and their views are considered unfashionable, if not an outright authoritarian invocations of a hierarchy based on an unequal power relationship. Teaching politics through debate and direct interaction is a way of actively opposing this tendency. Only by means of entering the cut and thrust of debate can we take politics and ourselves, as teachers and students of the subject, seriously.

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Essay Writing

Sophie Enos-Attali

Curiosity-raising and Essay-methodology As Useful Means for Teachers

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Teaching Argumentative Writing to Undergraduate Students

Sophie Enos-Attali

Curiosity-raising and Essay-methodology As Useful Means for Teachers

As a teaching assistant for more than three years, I have a short but quite diverse experience in teaching political science, since I've taught to different types of students. In fact, some of my students have just begun studies of economics and social sciences with the intention of working in the business sector and are obliged to study political science without having chosen it. Others have chosen to study political science after having studied law for two or three years while yet others have chosen it after having studied history, philosophy, economy, English... Lastly, some are foreign students who have chosen to study political science in France.

Through these different situations, I have been confronted with numerous challenges, such as gaining student-acceptance although I'm not much older than they are, or making students active although they don't like academic studies, or creating a good, well structured and clear course. Here, I'd like to deal specifically with two of these challenges. The first one has to do with motivation: how can you make students be interested in a course, especially those who are obliged to take the course without having chosen it? The second point is about methodology: how can you teach students to work well- to read and think critically and to write a good essay? These two questions are presented here separately for the sake of clarity although I think a link can be established between them, since they both have the same goal: making courses helpful for students.

Making students be interested in a course: A perpetual challenge

Making students interested in what you teach is one of the most important and, at the same time, most difficult challenges with which every teacher is confronted. Through my short experience, I would tend to say that it is not because students choose the topic someone teaches that they are necessarily interested in the course taught: things are far from being that easy. In these conditions, are there any tricks to interest every student in a course?

It is increasingly acknowledged that learning rather than teaching as a goal when building a course is a good way to make it interesting to students (Barr and Tagg 1995). This means students have to be considered as the core of the course and the course has to be conceived in order to increase students' knowledge. But, as Robert B. Barr and John Tagg point it out, such a vision, which they call the "Learning Paradigm", "has always lived in [teachers'] hearts [...] but the heart's feeling has not lived clearly and powerfully in our heads", with the result that this paradigm may remain an abstract concept. It is then necessary to give some concrete examples of the forms the implementation of this Learning Paradigm can take (Toohey 1999).

On the practical level, the "Learning Paradigm" means at first that each course has to be shaped so that students feel their teacher wants to make them learn and understand something which is useful or, at least, which can become useful for them. I think such a goal can be reached if the teacher does his/her utmost to make his/her students share with him/her his/her enthusiasm for the topic. In order to reach this goal, it is necessary for a course to be lively: students don't abide teachers who read their lesson, since that doesn't allow them share the lesson and feel empathy for the issue taught. The teacher has to show his/her students how much he/she feels involved by what he/she teaches, how important it is for him/her to make his/her students at least understand the course and, at best, be interested in it.

To make my courses lively, I usually try to present things as if I had lived them: that means I try to relate the facts and not simply state them. Moreover, I also try to give some examples which make sense for the students, such as for instance, examples taken from the everyday life or from current events in France or internationally. And, of course, during class, I endeavour to explain to my students why it is necessary for them to know what I am trying to teach them, in other words to make them understand the relevance, the significance of the course.

Beyond that, I would say that with each class, one must find the appropriate way to present a topic. In other words, one must adapt one's

way of teaching to one's students. For example, with students who do not choose to study political science and who, apparently, are not interested in it, I try to make them feel concerned by what I say. During my course on political institutions' history, that goes back to the end of the Middle-Ages, I usually do my best to show the students which traces of this history still remain in contemporary France or I compare to the present situation, trying to show the progress realized through the centuries.

Of course, this is not always easy and you can't always do it, but it can be very useful. On the other hand, with students who chose my course and are well-motivated, I feel it necessary to foster their interest. One way to do it is to dig deeper into the subject or to adopt an original approach to the subject, underscoring hidden or ignored aspects of this subject.

Last, but not least, students are more interested in a course if they are involved in it. And this is possible especially through debates. Students (particularly the foreign ones) like discussing an issue and giving their opinions. At the same time, it is not that easy to organize a debate. What I generally do is either give them some information and then ask them what they think about what I said or give them documents to read and then make them discuss these papers as a group. I find the experience quite positive and hence convincing: almost all students have something to say on a subject, even on subjects didn't originally interest them. In other words, I would say that debating an issue helps make students relate to this issue.

But arousing interest is not enough. Once students are interested in the course, the teacher has to try their best to make students think by themselves, to reach a good level of discussion and to write good essays, in other words to work properly. What is the best way to reach such a goal?

Teaching how to work properly: An uneasy but feasible task?

As the advocates of the Learning Paradigm put it, the aim of a course is to make students gain something they did not have before attending the course. This means that a course has to yield results: if the inputs of a course, as those presented above, are important, they don't dominate; what dominates is the outcome of a course. In other words, it is not only necessary to make everything in order to make students be interested in the subject taught to them, it is essential as well to make students progress.

In my opinion, if progress can be reached through the passing on of knowledge, what may be more important is to help students to acquire some general skills. I think that beyond the knowledge, skills are the most important, since they may be useful to the students for the duration of their studies and even throughout their lives. As Astin (1991) puts it, one may

focus on students' talents and abilities. This means that what prevails is not so much covering the syllabus than handing the students a critical mind, a sense of argumentation, and an ability to discuss a topic in an organized way. How can one accomplish such a goal?

The Learning Paradigm considers that the chief agent of the process of learning is the learner (Barr and Tagg 1995), hence suggesting that in order to learn, students have to be the main actors (and not subjects) of a course (Huba and Freed 1999). If, on one hand, the idea of "teacherless" courses evoked by Robert B. Barr and John Tagg goes probably to far, on the other hand, it is certain that "active learning" (Bonnwell et. al. 1991), based on students' involvement is a good way to achieve results (Astin 1991). With my foreign students, I have developed a students-centred method of teaching skills, which I follow with my other students. It is not that original, but it works quite well: at least, I would say it is rarely completely useless.

First of all, students need to have critical thinking abilities, since it helps them develop an argumentation. In order to enable students to develop their critical mind, I usually ask them to read a text (either an official text or a newspaper article) and to analyze it and then to give their opinion on it, so that there is a debate. Such exercises are an occasion to show students some original ways of thinking and, especially, to teach them how to develop an argumentation and a counter-argumentation, especially if the class is divided in two groups which are supposed to develop opposed ideas and if some students are dedicated to the organization of the debate. The more regular the exercise is, the more the students develop their critical mind and their sense of argumentation. This lies within what Howard Gardner calls "education for understanding" (Barr and Tagg 1995), which aims at bringing students "to bear on new problems and situations, deciding in which ways one's present competencies can suffice and in which ways one may require new skills or knowledge."

But, if a critical mind and a sense of argumentation are most useful to write an essay, they are not sufficient. And one needs to devote at least two lessons to methodology. Usually, to teach students how to write an essay, what I do first is to write one with them. I choose the subject for an essay and, then, with the students, I analyze the words of the subject. Then, I ask the students to tell me all the ideas that come to their mind to deal with such a subject, and I examine with them which ideas fit well with the subject and which ones should be added to their list. Finally, I show them how these ideas could be presented in order to get a proper essay and I formulate the essay orally.

After that, I give the students a subject for another essay and I ask them to do the preliminary work: analyzing the words of the subject and finding

some ideas to discuss it. During this second stage, I usually try to speak individually with the students to give them personalized advice during the exercise. Then, some student volunteers submit orally their proposal for the subject: all the proposals submitted are discussed in the class with all the students. After this discussion, students are invited to write a draft of the essay and every draft is corrected. To finish, I give a new subject and each student has to work by himself to write an essay on it. After two or three exercises of this type, students usually know how to write a good essay.

Of course, these methodological tricks don't always work and have to be adapted to the number of students, to their level and so on. Moreover, they imply small groups of students and require a lot of time and it is hence not always feasible to implement them. Nevertheless, despite everything, I find them quite efficient and try to apply them each time it is possible.

To conclude, I'd like to return to what I consider the most important thing when teaching. Teaching is far more than passing on knowledge to students: the aim of a course is to develop students' curiosity, to make students feel like learning, to give them analytical tools, and to increase their critical sense. In my opinion, if a teacher keeps that in mind when making his/her course, then he/she will probably reach some of these goals and help his/her students a lot.

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Irina Mattova

Essay Writing: Avoiding Plagiarism

Essay writing is considered to be one of the basic skills students should learn and improve during their university studies, especially when studying humanities. Writing itself should help them understand how to structure and formulate their ideas, and how to use the tools of standard written language. At the same time it should support the development of their critical thinking as well as the ability to obtain, analyze, and present information from different sources and strictly distinguish the ideas of others from their own ideas.

Gradual development of writing skills throughout their studies can also prove to be a useful preparation for thesis elaboration and could help students pluck up the courage to publish their best pieces of writing.

Plagiarism – the most frequent difficulty and its possible causes

During my teaching experience¹ I have come across with about 150 essays written on various subjects by students of different seminar groups. There were many difficulties I had to explain or deal with, but one of them occurred regularly. It was the phenomenon of plagiarism² in all its possible

¹ I have been teaching Comparative Politics to 2nd year students and Globalization and Global Problems to 5th year students at the Department of Political Science at the University of Prešov, Slovakia, for 2 years.

² The precise definition of plagiarism itself has become a subject of discussion between many scholars. For the short summary of different approaches see Carroll, J. and Appleton, J. (2001:13-4).

There are also many diverse approaches to categorisation of plagiarism. J. Evans (2000), for instance, distinguishes three types of plagiarism – auto-plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and cryptomnesia, whereas C. Barnbaum (2002), for example, deals with five types of

forms – from borrowing of the ideas by one author to the combination of texts by several authors, and translations without any sense.³ The frequent occurrence of the phenomenon made me realize that all essay writing tasks were losing their sense. Therefore, I started thinking about possible reasons for students' dishonesty in order to understand and eliminate it in future.

Disregarding personal characteristics of individual students, I found several aspects that could influence their ability to write without stealing the ideas of the others. One of them could be interconnected with a more general aspect – lack of motivation. Most students do not understand essay writing as the way to learn something, they usually see it as the unpleasant and difficult way of getting credit. Thus, they look for the solution to overcome their problem as easily and quickly as possible. Apart from this, even motivates students who work really hard usually do not know how to write. They do not know how to transform their ideas into an academic piece of writing, to what extent they can use the words of other authors, or how to quote and make reference to source material. Moreover, they may lack some other skills important for writing, e.g. systematic work and timing.⁴

Along with the above mentioned subjective reasons of students, it is also us, teachers, who may unintentionally help spread plagiarism. We may assign students to write too long essays without giving them detailed instructions. When we teach numerous students, we may not be able to carefully read all their essays and thus not give them appropriate feedback. Above all, when there is no coordination between teachers, students may be assigned too many essays for different subjects, which they are not able to cope with.

My suggestion to solve the difficulty

My proposals on how to avoid students' plagiarism result from the above analysis and are simple reactions to it. First of all, I think it is necessary to motivate students, to explain to them the necessity of developing writing skills and to show them that the acquisition of said skills can be useful for

plagiarism – copy & paste plagiarism, word switch plagiarism, style plagiarism, metaphor plagiarism, and idea plagiarism.

³ Another symptom was that students preferred to hand in much longer essays than required in order to avoid reading and analyzing, or at least condensing the original text.

⁴ Many students tend to start working on their essays just a couple of days before the deadline and then they do not have enough time to research, study new sources, analyze them and synthesize, nor to form their own opinion, and in some cases to write. They just feel a strong pressure to produce something of whatever quality.

them in future.⁵ Then it is important, especially for the first-and-second-year students,⁶ to provide them with brief and meaningful instructions on searching for and selecting sources, on scientific methods they may use during their analysis, on the form and content of the required essay, and on how to quote, paraphrase and refer to sources.⁷

The meaningful thing also seems to be assigning shorter essays to the first-and-second-year students and gradually impose more and more requirements on them year by year. Another important issue is to make students work systematically throughout the semester. It could be useful to set several deadlines for finishing particular parts of their writing assignment and for handing in their draft to the teacher. I suggest to set at least three deadlines – the 1st deadline should indicate when students should hand in the name of the particular topic they would like to write about, the list of sources they will use, and the main ideas of their essay; for the second the 2nd deadline they should hand in the first draft of their essay; and the 3rd deadline should be that of the final version. Each deadline should be followed by teacher's evaluation of individual works.

On one hand, this activity is time demanding for a teacher, but on the other, it is very important to give students feedback and guidance, if necessary. Students may thus learn more and it can increase their motivation for further writing. Teachers should also coordinate essay writing tasks with their colleagues to avoid overloading students with responsibilities.

Besides these measures I suggest communicating with students predominately via internet. It spares time and paper, and it is a very flexible instrument. Moreover, teachers receive essays in electronic form, which may help them reveal plagiarism because the best and the most common source of stolen ideas nowadays is the internet. Teachers can simply copy whatever part of a student's writing and check its source.

⁵ I think it is possible to motivate students in different ways. One can emphasize, for example, that once having acquired writing skills, they will be able to elaborate their thesis easily and with a higher quality. Another example that could work is to explain to them how the development of writing skills can improve their ability to think and communicate ideas in general. As well, I think that students' motivation would be highly stimulated if they had the possibility to publish their short essays, e.g. in some student journals.

⁶ In our study program there is a topic devoted to the problems of writing. It is designed for 5th year students as a preparation course for thesis writing. However, in my opinion it is too late to teach students how to write. They will understand the basic rules, but there is not enough time for them to acquire writing skills.

⁷ I think it is useful to prepare these instructions in writing and give them to students at the beginning of the semester.

Conclusion

I have applied the above measures for just one semester as of yet. However, in comparison to the previous semesters I observed greater interest from students in researching sources and their more frequent appearances during my consultation hours as soon as the measures were introduced. Subsequently the imposition of three deadlines proved to be very useful. As the 1st deadline was approaching, the vast majority of students definitely decided on a particular topic and had a clear conception of their essay as well as enough relevant sources to study.⁸

During the period between the first two deadlines the students focus shifted slightly from questions regarding content to questions regarding how to quote correctly specific cases not listed in the instructions. Accordingly I could follow the different stages of completing their essays. Whereas this period was the most demanding for a student, the following one – consisting of careful reading, correcting, and making comments on students' pieces of writing⁹ – was the most demanding for the teacher. However, mistakes in quotation and paraphrasing as well as several attempts to plagiarize were revealed in time, with enough time for students to correct and rewrite their writing. The final versions of students' essays were thus of higher quality.

I would very much enjoy if my remarks become an inspiration for my young colleagues in looking for the most effective approach to teaching essay writing. I hope that it will help avoid plagiarism, or at least help find it during the semester, when there is enough time for the teacher to reveal and stop it and still enough time for students to correct and rewrite their writing.

⁸ At this stage only a couple of problems occurred, such as the need to rearrange the structure of the essay, the lack of relevant sources, failures in e-mail delivery, or the need to extend the deadline for some students.

⁹ As all the essays were hand in by e-mail in electronic form, I had a wide variety of possibilities how to indicate problematic passages in the text – using different types of brackets, colours, highlighting and underlining to distinguish between comments and mistakes of different character (grammatical, semantic, stylistic, regarding quoting and paraphrasing etc.). Moreover, to better organize my work I created a special e-mail box to store all the essays and I followed the rule (which I also announced to students) that I would correct the essays in the order in which they were delivered and that I would reply to each student immediately after the correction of their essay.

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Katsia Dryven

Teaching Argumentative Writing to Undergraduate Students

My experience comes from teaching second and third year undergraduate students at the European Humanities University (EHU) in Minsk, where I started teaching after obtaining my master's degree in Political Science and becoming a PhD student in Social Psychology. The European Humanities University is a prominent non-state university in Belarus. The university was established in Minsk in 1992, in the first days of Belarusian independence, by a group of professors and the Belarusian Orthodox Church, which created its first department of theology. The concept was to create a private institution modelled on universities in Britain and the United States.

EHU served 1,000 students and was especially well known for its graduate programs in philosophy, law, politics, languages and European studies. It was an independent university that stood out for its strong leadership, intellectual autonomy, dedication to liberal arts education and international scholarly ties. But its very existence posed a threat to “Europe's last dictator”, Alexander Lukashenko, who rules Belarus through fear and coercion. After unsuccessfully trying to remove the university's rector, Lukashenko forced EHU to shut down in July 2004. The action was part of a broader campaign to stifle intellectual and academic freedom in Belarus. Having no political agenda, the European Humanities University has nonetheless been transformed into a political symbol.

With the international support EHU, not welcomed by the Belarusian authorities, re-emerged as EHU-International, with many of its old programs continued in its new institutional form on the grounds of Mykolas

Romeris University in Vilnius. Activities of the new EHU-International will be carried out under the supervision of the American Council for International Education, an exchange agency with significant field experience in the region. The European Parliament passed a resolution on January 9 voicing satisfaction with plans to re-open EHU in Vilnius and urged member states to support the initiative. On June 9 in Vilnius an inaugural conference was held on the initiative to recreate EHU as a university in exile.

I am lucky and proud to have started my academic and teaching career at EHU – its scholarly traditions have fostered in me a serious and earnest approach to learning and teaching and no-nonsense attitude to myself, which now, working at Minsk Institute of Management, I try to transfer to my students class after class.

The module I taught when at EHU was *Argumentative Writing*. I am convinced that writing an argumentative essay is one of the hardest skills any student has to learn. There are so many steps along the way: finding a topic, doing preliminary research, choosing a thesis, making notes and organizing, building up consistent argumentation, writing a rough draft, editing and revising, and putting together a neat copy that will impress the teacher. It can be intimidating, especially because neglecting the work in any of these steps can lead to a shoddy and incomplete paper. I should say that consistent argumentation is, actually, one of the skills that any alumnus will need later on in his/her career.

In this paper I want to share some ideas that I found to be personally useful. I am convinced that there is no sure-fire way to teach or learn argumentative writing. There are just some things that might make it easier, and that is what I am presenting.

My students came from different backgrounds. One year I had political scientists and general psychologists, next year I had art critics, designers and tourism managers. Knowing your audience is critical both for teaching and essay-writing – so this is the skill that both my students and I had to master and I believe we met the challenge gracefully. As a result, I learnt how to make a course audience-specific, and the students mastered the skill of building-up their argumentation with regard to the potential reader. That was not an easy task to do though – some students struggled with expository and argumentative writing as they were not prepared to deal with some of the abstract concepts that the discourse of writing requires, such as writing for a non-existent audience. Walter J. Ong (1975) argues that writing is a more difficult method of discourse than conversation because writers do not receive any immediate feedback when they are composing. I tried to help my students by asking them to define who the

possible target audience of the essays we discussed and by designating a specific audience that they were to write for. Thus they could interact virtually with the reader, which made their argumentation flow smoothly (Blakeslee 2001).

Apart from bearing in mind their prospective audience, I found it particularly essential to explain to students the importance of remaining themselves and using their own “voice.” This might seem trivial, but it comes from my own experience: I had read so many dull and impersonal argumentative essays before I managed to persuade my students that it is their unique self I was most interested in. In his article, “What Do We Mean When We Talk About Voice in Texts?” Peter Elbow (1991) pinpoints the problem: “There is a ... reason - culturally produced - why we often don't hear a voice in writing. Our culture of literacy has inculcated in most of us a habit of working actively to keep the human voice out of our texts when we write.”

Elbow, a leader in the authentic voice movement, posits that people leave voice prints much the same as fingerprints. He also points out that voice has senses, that is, it is audible, dramatic, and recognizable/distinctive, has authority, and resonates or has presence. When the reader is the teacher, the student often is expected to produce academic discourse which, more often than not, is to the student an unutterable writing that distances the student from himself/herself and demands that he/she speak in an unfamiliar voice. As Deborah Dessaso puts it, “the result may be writing that satisfies the academy but creates a form of validated voice, that is, voice that needs permission to express itself only after it can cite a stream of references.

Such practices tend to say to the student that her voice is a Ms. Nobody and she needs the voice of a Ms. Somebody to give her credibility. The student pens words that do not originate from within her, words which, in effect, wall off her human voice from the writing texts.” Referring to my own experience, I admit that it may take a while for students to start using their own voice and write about something that they really care about, something that can give the teacher a window into their perspective/experience. This requires students’ confidence and teacher’s respect for any opinion expressed. Once they come to realize that you are genuinely interested in what kind of person they are, you get a chance to receive really personal and well-thought-out argumentative essays.

To attain this aim, I’ve been trying to emphasise to students that there is no incorrect answer/statement. In other words, every statement is correct if well-substantiated. This may not be an issue for “western” students, but in Eastern Europe, after its soviet past and times of communist terror this issue still bears some significance. In the communist period, in totalitarian

society, there was only one truth – official discourse produced by the soviet government. Nowadays in Belarus, unfortunately, we observe a lot of phenomena that very much remind me of those times. State ideology is inculcated in kindergartens and secondary schools, not to mention universities, where any nonconformist thought can result in unknown consequences. That is why students are often too cautious and it is a real challenge to make them intellectually adventurous. Writing unconventionally requires a great deal of fostering students' courage and self-assurance, which is up to the teacher.

On the other hand, I have experienced the opposite - some students indulge in another extremity, revealing absolute freedom of thought and pretending to be up to the challenge of writing on most burning or most cutting-edge topics that they, actually, know little about. I remember reading an essay on euthanasia that was mostly “beating about the bush” or an essay on the advantages of some hi-tech design software that “would revolutionize teaching design at the EHU if used.” It abounded in incomprehensible terms, which I asked my student to explain to me. He was shame faced when he had to confess that he did not know what they meant. I am deeply convinced that students should “write what they know,” and not worry about being completely original in their subject matter. In most cases, I care more (and I am not the only one who does so) about how a student writes about a topic than the topic itself.

Ideally, I love to see truly fine writing that reflects mature thought, a mastery of the language and mechanics, and a topic that reveals a great deal about the student simply because it tells a good story. Essays of that calibre are fairly rare, but I also appreciate pieces that possess the elements mentioned above though may not have them in equal share.

But one of the hardest challenges for me to overcome was students' plagiarism. I see several reasons why they resorted to it. Some students just lacked the skill of proper referencing. Some students who lacked confidence (or who had poor essay-writing skills) found the expectations of proper referencing daunting when applied to their writing process. They experienced a credibility gap, finding it hard to believe that I expected them to acknowledge every source - that would mean everything in their paper would be referenced. This attribute was premised on a profound lack of self-confidence and bewilderment as to how to develop personal ideas in an essay. Many of the students I spoke with were distressed when I pointed out that they had to acknowledge their sources. I am convinced that many students, lacking the confidence and the skills to develop their own analysis or argument, deliberately retreat to plagiarism in the desperate and naïve belief that other people's ideas will be mistaken for their own argument.

One of my third-year students wrote an argumentative essay on disability policy in Belarus. Her essay thoroughly and competently surveyed the literature on disability policy, but lacked adequate references. The paper was further flawed, because it displayed a total absence of argument throughout. The student had simply failed to assess the evidence or make judgements as to the relative significance of the material she had collected. When I tried to talk to her and we discussed the problems of referencing, she lamented, “How can I reference everything, if the whole essay comes from sources?” I agreed that this is how the essay appeared to me, and changed my tactic. I spent the rest of the hour praising her research skills, for she had collected relevant and crucial material.

Paragraph by paragraph, I encouraged her to explain the implications of this evidence for the essay question. I was not surprised, given her research, that it took little effort on my part for her to start making the judgements that led her to develop a cogent thesis. At this point she broke into tears, and lamented that no one in university had asked her to think and develop her own argument. Since no one had cared what she thought about the topics in her essays, she had lost interest in writing essays. Essays had become boring exercises in expressing other people's ideas. She felt she had missed out on a whole dimension of learning. By talking about her own ideas, she quickly learned the importance of maintaining the distinction between other people's ideas and her own.

What I learnt from this student is that it is the teachers' job to help students through this difficult transition from repeating other people's ideas to developing their own, and I think we should expect the bulk of this transition to occur in the first and second years of university.

When we insist that our students openly declare their use of sources, it becomes glaringly apparent that it is now their turn to say something. I am convinced that far from being a technical or mechanical issue, teaching proper referencing is intimately bound up with teaching students about thinking and developing their own ideas, arguments and judgements. Once students have clearly set out another person's ideas, they can then ask: So what? Why is this significant? How does this help answer the question? Luckily there are abundant resources that can help writing instructors teach the appropriate use of source materials more efficiently by integrating plagiarism prevention into the everyday learning environment of the composition classroom (MHHE). And teaching proper referencing can be yet another means to challenge and encourage students to think for themselves and develop critical argumentation.

To crown it all, I would like to add just one more thing that I always recommend to my students. This is to let their essay “mature” after it is

written, and then give it a second reading and editing. It's very tempting to hit the "send" button or hand in the essay, but it's definitely a good idea not only to proofread for mechanical errors, but also to consider whether there is a real point in the essay. Is it well developed? Do the ideas flow logically? The greater the sign of thoughtfulness, the better. The essay, as I see it, should show some level of sophistication, technical skill, and reasoning ability. And, of course, grammatical accuracy matters. A thoughtful essay that offers true insight will stand out unmistakably, but if it is riddled with poor grammar and misspelled words, it will not receive any serious consideration. Misspellings, awkward constructions, run-on sentences, and misplaced modifiers all cast doubt on the student's efforts (Clark 2003).

Finally, to impart my modest achievement on you: at the beginning of the course some of my students declared that writing an argumentative essay was a maddening and exasperating process for them; it was so rewarding for me to hear from them some time later that writing became easier and even fun.

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Originality

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Research Requested by Clients: The Cornell-Rousse Experience

Patrycja Matusz Protasiewicz

Stimulating Students' Interests

Tsveta Petrova

Research Requested by Clients: The Cornell-Rousse Experience

In this paper, I describe how case-study workshops could be structured around research requested by clients. I then discuss some of the merits and potential problems with this teaching method.

The Cornell University-Rousse municipality experience

I spent the summer of 2004 doing field research in the city of Rousse, Bulgaria, collecting data on the regional governance framework in Bulgaria. Upon my return to Cornell University, USA, I was invited by Professor David Lewis of the Cornell Institute of Public Affairs to assist him in developing and teaching a *Workshop on Developing Countries*, with Bulgaria as the case study for the course. I was to role-play the Deputy-Mayor of the Rousse Municipality and to ask the workshop participants to assist the Municipality with several local development projects. Having been in personal contact with the Rousse Deputy-Mayor, Valeri Andreev, the month prior, I offered to arrange that the workshop participants undertake research actually commissioned by the Municipality. Deputy-Mayor Andreev asked the students to prepare a Sustainable Development Strategy for the Municipality together with four pilot projects under the Strategy.

The workshop participants were organised into teams according to their areas of interest or expertise: agriculture, industrial development, tourism, or social reform. During the first part of the semester, I introduced students to selected issues of the capitalist and democratic transitions in Eastern

Europe in general and in Bulgaria in particular. As homework, the workshop participants were asked to analyze data collected by the Municipality of Rousse. Together with the assigned readings and my lectures, these analyses served to prepare the students for the weekly discussions about some of the challenges and opportunities the transition posed to settlements like Rousse.

During the second half of the semester, Professor Lewis lectured on different topics in development studies. The students were working with their interest area team-mates on group reports, detailing 1) the priorities for local development in Rousse Municipality and 2) concrete measures that could be taken in line with those priorities, while at the same time ensuring coordination among the four teams for both tasks. The students presented the first draft of their reports for comments to two Rousse Municipality officials and to other professors within the Department. After implementing the reviewers' suggestions, the workshop participants turned in their work for use by the Rousse Municipality.

Advantages and applicability of research requested by clients

As a teaching method, research requested by clients is a learner-centred approach, because it makes use of individual differences in background, interests, abilities, and experiences and also that it treats learners as co-creators in the teaching and learning process.¹⁰ The effectiveness of learning through research requested by clients is further enhanced by the instructional variety encompassed by the method (Weaver, Kowalski and Pfaller 1994). It combines case use with experiential and team learning. As such it accommodates well constructivist perspectives on teaching (Bates and Poole 2003), as learning is treated as a social process of knowledge production rather than as a rule-based procedure for mastering facts or concepts, over which the individual learner has little control.

Pitfalls

Before discussing the educational merits of research requested by clients, a word of caution about the method's limitations is in order. In purely practical terms, one of the difficulties we encountered was that municipal officials, while extremely cooperative and responsive,¹¹ were

¹⁰ On learner-centered approaches to higher education and its benefits, see "Teaching, Learning..." (2005).

¹¹ It should also be noted that the personality and work style of the contact person at the Municipality was crucial to the success of the workshop. The official who was assigned to work with us on developing the report was extremely cooperative and open-minded; rather

understandably working on schedules that did not always work well with the class' timetable. This meant that sometimes we would be waiting for information to be forwarded to us and other times we would be overwhelmed by sudden bursts of data that needed to be urgently analyzed. Previous research on case use warns of the potential time-consuming nature of the approach (Christensen 1987), which seems to be further exacerbated when real, ongoing (rather than fictitious) cases are employed. It seems, however, that if the research request is negotiated ahead of time and all the relevant information collected before the start of classes, such problems could be minimized.

When negotiating the research request, the class instructor should consider not just time management issues but should also ensure that the request would allow for the development of a whole course around the assignment. Alternatively, research requested by clients could be employed in lieu of individual or groups term papers. In addition, the client's research request should suit the intellectual abilities and research methods knowledge of students who would potentially enrol in the workshop. As a teaching method, research requested by clients appears most advantageous to advanced undergraduate or graduate students.

The Cornell university – Rouse Municipality experience suggests that research assignments that are useful to the client usually tend to fall within the range of most advanced students' abilities but are still challenging to them (and such tasks neither discourage nor bore the students, motivating them instead (Pintrich 1994). Lastly, the teamwork component and the heavy workload of the workshop require that this teaching method be avoided in classes where free riding might be a problem since student performance depends partially on the performance of a student's teammates.

Merits

With that said, there are numerous advantages to involving students in research requested by clients. Advising on policy-making engages and motivates students: not only were students spending nearly twice the number of hours Cornell University recommends for adequate preparation for a seminar of this level but students also developed a real sense of ownership of the project and were genuinely excited about presenting their recommendations to municipal officials. It is well established that the more

than as a chore or a nuisance, he saw our collaboration as an opportunity to harness the expertise of students from one of the U.S. Ivy League Universities to the advantage of Rouse Municipality.

intellectually (Bonwell, Eison 1991) and emotionally (Boud and Garrick 1998) involved in the learning process students become, the more they learn and that student engagement is increased when students feel a sense of control over their own learning (Alderman 1999). In this sense, in combining case study with experiential learning techniques, research requested by clients appears to be one of the most effective teaching methods when it comes to facilitating active and interactive learning. The Rouse Municipality request enticed most students to participate by making them responsible for developing a set of consequential policy recommendations, while at the same time allowing workshop participants to “discover” knowledge for themselves (Jones 1994) in the process of looking for these policies.

Research requested by clients – as other case use techniques – compels students to think critically and creatively about what they were learning. Students were no longer reading simply to extract arguments but also became concerned about the weaknesses and the exceptions to the arguments they encountered in the readings. Then, in class, workshop participants would often engage in discussions about the ways these arguments can be improved or extended to new cases. At the end of the workshop students had become fairly comfortable in easily moving between theory and empirical observations; that is deconstructing relevant theories and using empirical observations to back up or challenge different theoretical propositions. Therefore, the Cornell University – Rouse Municipality experience confirms existing evidence (Major 2005) that (theoretical) knowledge is retained and reinforced best through practical applications.

Equally importantly, because this was a real, ongoing case, students had ready access to relevant municipal officials, who would help students to think through their ideas’ assumptions and implications. In such consultations workshop participants learned to formulate recommendations, which are specific, applicable, and feasible, and not only political and financially feasible but also socially considerate. And while little evidence suggests that “real” cases are more effective vehicles to learning than fictitious ones (Weaver, Kowalski, Pfaller 1994), in real and ongoing cases students gain exposure to the complexities of organizational life and learn that professional practice does not occur in isolation.

Finally, in bringing together team-learning (Michaelsen 1994) with a work-based approach (Major 2005) to education, the workshop opened up the opportunity for a diversity of student and practitioner voices and promoted the development of a culture of inquiry. Not only were workshop participants learning how to benefit from consultation and collaboration but

they were also acquiring analytical skills and problem solving abilities as well as techniques for effective public presentation of their work. In very instrumental terms, research requested by clients prepares students well for the job market by introducing them to real work environments.

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Patrycja Matusz Protasiewicz

Stimulating Students' Interest

Young scientists are to fulfil two major tasks: firstly their research, followed by publications and their teaching work - no matter which university they work for. Those scientists who give priority to research over teaching gain recognition more readily, for in the world of science the measure of our success is the number of good scientific publications. Successful university teachers may rarely find their work extremely satisfying in terms of being recognized and rewarded as their work is evaluated mostly by students. The best solution is to be a good university teacher and a good scientist at the same time!

As Hans-Dieter Klingemann (2005) notes: "Teaching is not an easy task. It needs authority and empathy. Authority is based on competences. 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 student's problems - help them to ask questions, familiarize them how to analyze and discuss results and - most importantly - motivate students." However, my own experience shows how much time it takes initially to prepare the first seminars and lectures.

This branch of science is my passion and my students are new to it. I believe that the satisfaction resulting from giving these students an incentive to work and access to new areas of knowledge in this science can be in itself more important than a new scientific publication. Generally, universities ought to teach thinking and stimulate students to broaden their knowledge and to search for the answers to some vital questions. I am guided by this idea throughout my work as a university teacher and I would like to tell you more about it.

A new course in the curriculum...

At present I am a third year PhD student at the Institute of International Studies at university of Wrocław, Poland. My research is focused on the analysis of the Dutch model of the integration policy for immigrants. The problem of the immigration and integration policy and related issues in Polish science is still at its initial stage of development. On the one hand, it is a great challenge. On the other hand however, I have to do without established patterns and ready answers to my doubts and questions. My work has often been supported by my experience gained abroad, and I hope that to my students my classes have been a positive and powerful stimulus to work and learn new answers.

I have contributed to the broadening of the curriculum at our Institute by launching my own individually-developed courses as part of the program offered by our Institute. Owing to the pioneering nature of these subjects and discussed issues, one should expect that only a few students would show interest in attending them. In addition, one should mention the fact that my classes are offered to the 4th year students holding a Bachelor's degree who continue their studies in order to receive a Master's degree. As a result they demonstrate a good level of knowledge and related terminology. They have already seen various ways of teaching and are demanding, which makes it even more difficult for a first-time university teacher.

...New methods of giving classes?

To begin with, at this point I would not like to describe my own experience connected with finding methods of stimulating students to search and to work creatively. Yet, I want to present my ways of avoiding monotony in class and providing students an incentive to do more than just obligatory tasks. My introductory classes are usually focused on meeting all members of a given group and identifying the level of general knowledge individual students demonstrate. It is important to me to identify the most self-confident and opinionated students as many of this group are able to spoil every class. In discussions such students are always determined and persistent in expressing their opinions and they eliminate the shy participants who are often more knowledgeable.

I find essential to remember that as early as at the initial meeting all students should feel that their input is equally important and interesting to the class and teacher and that there are no better or worse people among them. Therefore to encourage them during our first encounter I usually prepare some simple tasks. After giving students some basic terminology,

the group jointly comes up with basic definitions in the field of international migration, stimulated by some additional questions, anecdotes or puzzles. Such discussions which make all students involved in their work enable them to know each other better and understand that the main objective of such meetings is a professional discussion and exchanging opinions.

Creating the right atmosphere during the first meeting makes students behave politely and show tolerance to different ideas represented by other students even though they might be contrary to their own views. In Poland, students are used to reading articles prepared by their teachers, learning by heart, and to the mechanical reconstruction of factography during exams. In my classes I put a lot of effort into teaching my students a critical evaluation of the presented views, making conclusions as well as posing questions on the basis of related texts selected by me. Therefore, one of the methods employed by me during my classes is to divide its participants into two groups where one team is to defend the views presented by me whereas the other team is to criticize them.

Eszter Simon also notes the importance of this: “Role play is especially original in raising the attention of students, because first it presents an escape for students from the monotonous habit of frontal lecturing and second within guided circumstances, it offers students a challenge to use their originality” (Simon 2005). In my opinion this gives students an opportunity to get used to leading discussions, gathering objective arguments, playing a game with their opponents in debates and, what is equally important, to formulate correctly their thoughts.

Another vital element of education is the process of learning to work in a team and that is why my activities are often based on teamwork. What seems essential is to acknowledge students’ improvement, and to use their newly acquired theoretical knowledge in order to give them more and more difficult tasks. Tasks given in the first stage of classes, if too difficult for the general level of ability, often lead to discouragement caused by incomprehension and insufficient knowledge.

A regular and slow pace of learning complex theoretical issues leads to the situation where at a certain point students comprehend more and more. In Elisabeth Sheppard’s opinion: “the theories are not only simply just dry, but difficult to grasp for a first time IR student (in my case for the students that starts with theory of international migration). When students understand this they are suddenly much more motivated” (Sheppard 2005).

In my classes I always try to express satisfaction and appreciation to those students who find materials on topics which go beyond the sources prepared by their teacher. Being appreciated by the teacher is often a

perfect motivation. Last year I introduced group presentations which appeared to be very successful (two students under my supervision wrote their first scientific publication based on materials gathered). As our classes are focused on the issue of immigration and integration policy in the EU, students are divided into groups according to the countries designated as their case study.

Another important prerequisite of student's participation in a given group is their knowledge of a language spoken in the country the group is going to concentrate on. Each group has one semester to prepare their presentation. I use "marketing methods" as an encouragement for students to prepare interesting presentations. I express my interest in the innovatory aspects of projects at each stage of their development; often I introduce the element of competition which also positively affects students' involvement in projects. I discuss projects and provide additional materials, if necessary.

Apart from the case study itself (that is information on the policy of a given country towards immigrants) also the form of presentations is essential. Last year I was surprised by some exciting newspaper articles, TV documentaries from a variety of countries, internet sources, maps as well as very good multimedia presentations. The measure of students' dedication to their work on the presentations is the fact that we had to prolong our classes as we ran out of time.

In my opinion, all sources of current information ought to be accessed and thus should diversify classes. First of all, students should be taught how to assess the value of information, its credibility and to approach it in a critical way. Rejecting contemporary sources of information and employing only the traditional methods of disseminating knowledge does not attract students. "Given the wide range of resources that are now available within higher education, the scope for imaginative enquiries that are tailored to specific disciplines is increasingly evident"(Kahn and O'Rourke 2005). It seems to me that especially first-time university teachers ought to be open to learn new ways of stimulating students to think and deepen their knowledge. It is necessary to remember that each class should be a kind of a performance which could make students remember just a few significant notions which, in turn, might provoke them into learning more.

Teacher's dedication and passion

In my opinion, in order to be a successful (university) teacher and to give winning classes, which to me translates into students' satisfaction and their willingness to broaden the notions presented in class, the following elements are necessary:

- Teacher's sound *knowledge and passion*, which both help him/her earn esteem among students
- *Well-prepared and well-planned classes*, maintaining an adequate pace and good timing
- *Exciting reading sources* as an incentive to encourage discussions
- Searching for and applying *methods* of diversifying the traditional style of giving classes
- Making students feel that *each opinion is interesting* and each discussion is an important part of the class

Peter Kahn and Karen O'Rourke (2005) present a similar opinion about the creating of classes. They note some vital points:

- Asking open-ended questions that provoke further discussion and stimulate deeper exploration.
- Supporting students, motivating them to engage with the task and valuing their ideas and contributions.
- Encouraging students to reflect on their experiences.
- Monitoring progress and ensuring that students understand where they are in the process.
- Challenging student thinking, encouraging them to extend their boundaries and to seek new ways to work with problems and situations.
- Developing an atmosphere of trust in which students are willing to share and exchange ideas or work co-operatively."

Finally, I would like to tell all my colleagues who are about to start teaching that there is no greater satisfaction than students who are so preoccupied and busy with discussing scientific issues in class (on one beautiful May afternoon at the campus of our university) that they take no notice of the fact that the meeting came to an end some time ago. Therefore I wish all first-time university teachers nothing but such students in the class.

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Specific Teacher's Tasks

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Inga Ulnicane

Supervising Undergraduate Theses

As a young university teacher, I find the supervision of an undergraduate thesis to be one of the most challenging tasks. This also turns out to be the task for which I have been least prepared. Through several Teaching Assistantships and some teaching methods seminars I have learned a lot about structuring courses, preparing classes, conducting seminars, etc. However, issues related to thesis supervision were completely overlooked in my preparation for teaching.

Only when I was already supervising some undergraduates myself did I start to realise several complicated issues and difficulties involved in supervision. This made me think carefully about my approach to supervision and also to re-think my own experiences with supervisors. I believe that undergraduate supervision deserves to be discussed in teaching training because it is an important and complicated task: for students it is their first experience of doing individual research, and this experience might be important for them later, especially for those going on to graduate studies.

When I started to look for literature on supervision I found out that the situation of being unprepared for supervision tasks is not unique. According to Lewis and Habeshaw (1997), there is the general lack of provision of supervision training in higher education and most teaching training courses tend not to include in their programmes any training for the skills of the supervisor, which are clearly different from those of a lecturer and need to be developed separately.

Moreover, there also seems to be little literature on supervision of the undergraduate thesis. Most literature on teaching undergraduates is on course design, lectures, seminars, assessment, and other non-research

elements¹². One of very few books which address supervision at undergraduate level is Lewis and Habeshaw (1997) “53 Interesting Ways to Supervise Student Projects, Dissertations and Thesis” which provides some useful advice. This lack of literature on the subject might be explained by the fact that in many higher education systems there is no requirement to write a thesis at undergraduate level. There is more literature on supervising PhD thesis (e.g. Delamont et al 2004). Although this literature deals with supervision of more advanced students and more sophisticated research projects, it can also provide some useful tips for supervision of undergraduates because “many aspects of supervision are generic” (Delamont 2004: 6).

Specific characteristics of undergraduate thesis

In the higher education system in Latvia, undergraduate students have to write two theses – the first is at the end of their 3rd year (around 30 pages) and their Bachelor Thesis at the end of 4th year (50-60 pages). The aim of thesis writing is to give students their first experience with doing independent research and applying skills and knowledge they have obtained through their coursework. There is usually half a year during which students have to prepare their thesis concurrently normal levels of course work. So far, I have supervised five undergraduate theses and in my small ‘sample’ I have had quite hard working students. Therefore, so far I have not had to deal with basic motivation problems but I have encountered some more substantial difficulties.

One of the difficult choices for supervisor of undergraduate thesis is to find appropriate balance between providing necessary advice and letting students to learn to do their own independent research. Although even at doctoral level supervisors have to find a delicate balance between “heavy-handed dominance and a ‘hands-off’ neglect of their students” (Delamont et al 2004: 10) this problem is even more important at undergraduate level. My experience shows that especially at an early stage many students rather prefer to follow a teacher’s instructions than to undertake their own independent work.

Even those students who are excited about the opportunity of pursuing their own interests and ideas in their research projects sometimes expect that ‘all-knowing and all-powerful’ supervisors will solve problems, which arise during their projects. In this situation, the supervisor has to find ways how to provide constructive help without starting to make decisions and

¹² See, for example, list of teaching literature on the website of Curriculum Resource Center at Central European university: http://www.ceu.hu/crc/crc_visit_books.html.

solve problems in the student's place, which sometimes seems very tempting when the student is evidently struggling with simple research problems. Then one of the difficult tasks for supervisor is to phrase his/her suggestions in a way that could provoke students independent thinking rather than discourage and embarrass them or give impression that student has to follow some specific advice.

The student's independent research involves not only independent thinking and decision-making but also doing more practical things on their own, for example searching literature or defending their project in public presentations. These are also new things for them as there are no more course syllabuses, reading lists, etc. On these practical issues I provide an initial help and then encourage them to proceed independently later. For example, at the beginning of the project I provide them with titles of the main books, names of leading authors, databases and academic journals relevant for their topic.

Later on I encourage them to find further literature themselves by checking bibliographies of main books and journals, using databases, web pages of leading scholars, etc. From time to time I check their bibliographies and point out any shortcomings, for example, missing out some important work, relying too heavily on the so-called 'grey literature' or using out-dated sources. When it comes to public defences of their thesis I prefer to discuss with them possible defence strategies before presentations and main comments afterwards but during presentations they have to defend their projects on their own.

Although it has always been obvious for me that one of the aims of undergraduate dissertation is to develop skills of students to be an "independent learner" (Lewis, Habeshaw 1997: 41) I have found out that my supervision strategy based on this implicit assumption has been unclear and puzzling for my supervisees. They have sometimes been frustrated by my strategy because on their part there have been implicit expectations that I will take responsibility of their thesis, will do part of the work and provide some kind of 'spoon-feeding' for them.

Therefore, at the beginning of the supervision process it is useful to have an explicit discussion with student about his/her view of the supervisor's role (Lewis, Habeshaw 1997: 31-32) and the distribution of responsibilities between supervisor and student (Delamont et al 2004: 22-23). This might be one way to avoid their over-dependence on supervisor and get them to be more autonomous. In order to familiarise students with their responsibilities I also find useful to suggest them to read the students guide to doing dissertations in political science by Silbergh (2001) which is the

only undergraduates guide to political science dissertations I am familiar with.

On a more practical side, it also seems very important to discuss at the beginning how students would like to distribute their time allowance (Lewis, Habeshaw 1997: 32). If (according to university regulations or other commitments) supervisor can spend 12 hours per undergraduate thesis then the student has to be made aware of this. The student is enabled to suggest his/her preferences on what proportions of the time should be spent on meetings and discussions and how much on reading and commenting on drafts. I have not done this before but have encountered problems where a student expects me to read many drafts and always provide extensive comments on those drafts without realising how time consuming it is.

Helping to design focused and realistic research projects

A common problem in undergraduate projects is that students start from very broad topics and over-ambitious research designs. General advice “to narrow it down” is not of much help when there are hundreds of options how to narrow down very broad topics. There are various strategies that supervisor might pursue at this point. The supervisor might direct (or even push) the student into a direction which is most familiar to him/herself, or might leave the student on his/her own to decide.

However, I think these are not the most appropriate strategies, because my assumption is that at the beginning many students already have specific views, ideas and interests about their very general topics but they have difficulties to express them in clear, consistent and coherent fashion. Therefore, I think that the task of supervisor is not to impose or push the student into any particular direction but to help to articulate his/her own interests.

For that purpose the supervisor has to learn more about the interests and background of a particular student. In order to do that, I find it useful to start with discussion of their broader professional interests and how their dissertation topic might fit within these broader interests. For example, how did the students get interested in their topics, what do they like about it, are they interested in related real world problems, have they come across these problems in courses they have taken, what are their future plans and so on.

Answers to these questions sometimes reveal that students are already looking at their rather broadly worded topics from some very specific perspectives, but without an awareness of specific academic debates they have difficulties in expressing their interests systematically and in appropriate political science terminology. At this point, the supervisor

might identify relevant literature, scholars and issues and provide some specific background information, which might help the student in articulating his specific research interest and narrowing down the topic.

I also think that there are some things which the supervisor has to avoid at this early stage of narrowing down a topic. These things include heavy scholarly jargon, very concrete questions about the research question and hypothesis, open testing of the student's background knowledge on his/her chosen topic and relevant literature. These methods might not be very useful at the very beginning of a project as they could just embarrass and discourage students.

Some other problems and initial solutions

When more specific research interests are defined, the next challenge for student is to plan and organise the research project. I find it useful to ask students to prepare their time schedules in which they identify time for specific steps of their projects: literature review, specific chapters, field research, etc., and if necessary we discuss some of the items. For example, one student scheduled interviews during the last month of the project. I told her that this seems to be too late and I reminded her of the procedures which that method of interviewing involves (e.g., making transcripts, codifying information, analysing) and encourage her to allocate the time necessary for them.

Sometimes students also have very ambitious plans about extensive field research involving large questionnaires and many interviews. It is also useful to discuss which of these methods are really necessary and can be feasibly done within their undergraduate thesis, and which ones can be left for their graduate projects.

In their time schedules I also ask them to put in deadlines when they will send their draft chapters to me. In order to encourage them to comply with these self-imposed deadlines I tell them in advance that I take note of all these deadlines and I have included them in my schedule. I inform them that if they miss their deadlines, I cannot promise I will have a time to read and comment on their work. So far, this has seemed to help them to comply with deadlines but quality of submitted drafts has sometimes been such that I have wished they had worked longer on them.

When undergraduate students start to work on their own research, one common problem area is that they very easily get lost among various approaches, theories, concepts and methods. In a way, this is also a new world for them as they are out of the more comfortable world of lectures and textbooks where topics are usually presented in structured and

summarised manner. Taking into account this possibility of students losing track and wasting too much time ‘on a tangent’ it is useful to remind them to keep in mind their main question and to prioritise and organise their research according to that.

Another problem is that thesis writing reveals some gaps in a student’s previous education. One of the common gaps is in methodology. Usually students have had their introductory methodology class in their freshman year but by the time of writing their own thesis they have forgotten most of it. For example, when I have reminded several times to one of students that she had yet to come up with her hypothesis, she suddenly asked “Do I really need a hypothesis? What purpose would hypothesis serve in my project?”

This was a clear signal that we have to go back to discuss some basic questions about research design. Some of the unclear methodological issues can be clarified during supervision but sometimes students also have to repeat and check some methodological issues on their own. For that purpose I have compiled a list of textbooks on political science methodology for undergraduates to consult. I also think a series of methodological seminars would be effective, or even a course during the semester when students write their dissertations.

Putting the first dissertation into perspective

It is also important to help students to put their dissertation into perspective and to look beyond its submission as one of requirements for their first degree. It is useful to discuss possibilities to develop their thesis topic into a graduate thesis. If they do not want to continue on to graduate studies then they might be interested how they can use their project and knowledge obtained during writing it for their job search. I also try to provide them with information on relevant summer schools, conferences, internships, graduate programs, and scholarships.

Conclusion

The undergraduate thesis usually is the first independent research experience for students and the success of it depends on both the supervisor’s guidance and the student’s readiness to undertake responsibility for their independent research work. The supervisor has to provide explicit guidance at the beginning, advice throughout the project and feedback on written chapters. However, much will depend on students – their previous education, their willingness to take their supervisor’s

advice into account, the time and effort they are ready to invest in their thesis and also their future plans.

Only a few undergraduates will move into research careers. The undergraduate thesis might help them to decide whether they would like to do research in the future, in particular, whether they enjoy intellectual challenges and whether they are ready to cope with the difficulties which arise in the research process, such as uncertainty and loneliness.

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Luca Barani

Teaching Postgraduate Studies for Mature Adults

Nowadays, in post-industrialized countries, the general level of education is mounting, slowly but surely. The main reason is that contemporary productive life requires increasing levels of literacy and numeracy, necessary to cope with its current complexities. Accordingly, lifelong learning is viewed as necessary to live in what is called the “knowledge-based society.” Since the sixties, West European countries have developed more and more towards an economy that is predominantly aimed at the production of knowledge-intensive services (COM 2001: 678 final). By consequence, basic instruction was rendered compulsory *de jure* and, by the same token, higher education is deemed necessary *de facto*.

In this context, the demand for university post-graduate studies is stronger than ever, also for humanities and social sciences, even if they are not strictly necessary to handle everyday problems and are not legally compulsory. This situation, which can be seen as counter-intuitive, can be explained if we take into consideration the issue of higher education from the perspective of the job market.

Education degrees (and supposedly related skills) are titles that enable people in their possession to increase their salary and to improve their career prospects. Moreover, education is a positional commodity and it has to be assessed in a relational way. It means that the amount of education possessed by someone has to be assessed in relative terms, in respect of the general education level and of the relative rarity of the degree in question in the specific job market under consideration.

The implication of previous arguments is that the higher the level of general education in a given society, the tighter the race for advanced education qualifications. This means that there is a sizeable share of adult population, notwithstanding the fact of being already employed, which feels the need to return to schools and universities, in order to strengthen their curriculum. Acknowledging the emergence of this phenomenon, the rationale of this paper is to present the issue of postgraduate studies for adult candidates with working career experience. Postgraduate studies for students with working experience are analysed here because they are presumably an important niche of the education market for universities, in terms of potential profit and prestige.

For these reasons, the offer of university education on this segment of the market can be expected to grow consistently in future years. In the last fifty years, the participation of students in higher education has increased fivefold in Europe. The results of this increasing recruitment are far-reaching. The student population not only has become bigger, but more heterogeneous as well, in respect of age, social setting and religious background. This transformation has called in question the traditional methods of education, based on research-related teaching and mainly individual guidance.

On the side of the demand, prospective students with working experience are confronted with the pragmatic problem of maximizing the return of their education investments, in terms of salary and career. In addition, they are confronted with programmes and teaching staff without experience of addressing students with professional experience. At issue with the aforementioned phenomenon is the experience that the teaching of mature adults, especially with professional experience, is clearly different from that of young adults, approaching the job market for the first time.

Confronted with this demand, an increasing number of university PhD students, at best with experience on undergraduate teaching, are employed in such a type of teaching, without adequate preparation. This paper is meant to address this issue and the answers that can be provided to these students' needs, distinguishing between different dimensions of the problem of teaching postgraduate studies to mature adults, from a theoretical point of view. However, the solutions do not present themselves in a linear and clear way, but in a more entangled and messy manner, as it is shown by my own experience.

The characteristics of adult learning

According to theories of adult learning inspired by Knowles¹³, there are six peculiar aspects concerning the learning of adults, in opposition to traditional pedagogical models of child learning which present specific problems for the teacher. Technically, an adult student is anyone who has left full-time compulsory education, that is, in most European countries, anyone over 16. However, in the relevant literature, adult learning is used for referring to mature adults who return to education and training activities, either full- or part-time, after having completed at least a secondary education degree and entered the job market.

According to Knowles, mature adults firstly have a concept of themselves as responsible and autonomous learners, in charge of their own learning. This self-perception can lead to dismissal of pedagogical and hierarchical relationship promoted by traditional programmes.

Secondly, previous life experience, either personal or professional, considerably shapes the understanding of theories and facts presented to mature adults. They are likely to be influenced by the weight of their habits and to resist unusual ways of learning and unconventional theories.

Thirdly, the learning activities of mature adults are generally oriented to pragmatic needs, centred on real-life problems. This can result in questioning the need for fundamental research and incomprehension of abstract theories, which are not directly applicable to daily life situations.

Fourthly, readiness to learn in students with professional experience is very different according to the life stage on which they return to school. According to the individual development of personal life and career, and consequently of the social roles they perform, mature adults are more or less likely to adapt to certain models of learning.

Fifthly, mature adults usually want to understand why they need to engage in learning as a preliminary step before putting themselves to work. As a consequence, providing reasons for studying the reading material is very important, in order to obtain commitment from students with working experience.

¹³ The figure of Malcolm Knowles is central to the US adult education of the twentieth century. In the 1950s he was the Executive Director of the Adult Education Association of the USA. See his autobiography Knowles 1989. Malcom S. Knowles, *The Making of an Adult Educator* (Jossey-Bass: 1989).

In the adult education field, learning theory and the name of Knowles have become inextricably linked. His 1973 book "The Adult Learner", is now in its 5th edition, revised and extended by Elwood F. Holton and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* (Butterworth: 1998)

Sixthly, the motivation for learning is mainly external to the context of higher education. The mature adult students are mainly concerned with immediate self-satisfaction and self-improvement, as well as by considerations about future career and salary. As a result, it is unlikely that the instructor can influence their motivation by means of “sticks and carrots” in purely disciplinary terms.

Answering the needs of adult learners

Emerging from the discussion of adult learning developed earlier¹⁴ is the exigency for a specific style of teaching tailored to this kind of public. Related to this problem, here are some specific lessons drawn by my experience in teaching a seminar in theories of conflict resolution and peace studies, from the standpoint of international relations¹⁵.

Firstly, it helps to put explicitly mature adult students in charge of the learning process. This suggestion translates concretely in making clear to the students from the first day that the success of the class, including discussions and analysis, is their responsibility. In order to ensure that students read the assigned books chapters and articles, it is important not to be afraid to block the discussion if they did not do their homework. It is useful, from this perspective, to design the set texts in order to be able to distribute more or less paperwork according to the rhythm and pace of the students.

The previous point is linked to another, concerning the selection of texts and examples to be analysed in class. Articles or books dealing with general trends or phenomena are better assimilated by students if they contain real situations. By being relevant to students, these exercises can be perceived as useful to cope with daily life, and their content more easily appropriated. In the case of my experience in teaching a seminar of theories of international relations, it helps to take examples of daily life and apply some analytical scheme of conflict and cooperation developed at another level of abstraction. However, by focusing the learning process on problem-solving and emphasizing the practical dimension of much of the existing

¹⁴ These assumptions are the extension of earlier observations which Knowles made in his book, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy* (1970) based on his own experience as an educator of mature students in the early 1950s.

¹⁵ This paper is based on my experience as Teaching Assistant of the Post-Graduate Programme in International Politics of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, which can be accessed to the following website: www.ulb.ac.be/soco/mip. As a consequence of the aim and location of this program, the public which attended my seminars and tutorials was formed by public servants of International Organizations, personnel from international NGOs and personnel from multinational private firms, all living and working in Belgium.

literature, the teacher has to be careful to underline the necessity of a certain level of rigour and abstractness in discussion.

From the point of view of the teacher, in fact, it is necessary to remain in control of the learning process as a catalyst and facilitator agent, mobilizing and enabling the experiential capital of learners. Even if the teacher takes a step back, he/she occupies an authoritative place in the classroom, based on his/her knowledge of books and/or professional experience. If the educator has to be able to give a direction to the exchanges and interactions, mature students themselves are going to ask to be provided with case studies and readings, which can unblock their capital of knowledge and experience, to the benefit of the group.

This can be done more efficiently, from the point of view of the teacher, by assessing and evaluating the personal background of each student. This exercise can be done in two different ways. On the one hand, by means of a short questionnaire, it allows to know which specific competences are present in the classroom, without devoting too much time to this task from the point of view of the teacher. On the other hand, by means of a quick presentation on the first day, it facilitates mutual acquaintance and increases their commitment to the group, from the point of view of students.

On ultimate analysis, however, the most difficult barrier to overcome in mature adult education is a resistance to learning and a lack of motivation and desire to learn among students, traits which are not manageable by hierarchical discipline. In fact, this resistance is inherent to the teaching of mature students, because it derives from their self-concept as autonomous and self-sufficient individuals, with professional and personal experiences. Moreover, the learning of mature adults is influenced by their in-built habits and attitudes, as discussed earlier.

In order to deal effectively with these issues, the single most important recommendation addressed from the literature to the teacher is to move from the role of instructor to facilitator (Brookfield 1991), abandoning a disciplinary understanding of the enforcement of academic standards, in order to create a more effective self-sustainable dynamic of learning in the classroom. As explained before, mature students have to be motivated by showing the need for learning and overcome resistances to learn. A useful device, experimented in situation of adult education, is to provoke a cognitive shock (Bain 2004).

This exercise is aimed at creating a favourable environment for cross-dialogue and motivational commitment by developing a community of aim and purpose among students. By presenting a relevant situation for students, where common sense and conventional rules-of-thumb are likely to fail and leave them stranded, it is possible to start a common search for

different solutions and being receptive to alternative means of explanation. The teacher artfully creates this cognitive shock in order to involve the students emotionally in building a positive dynamic.

In the context of my teaching of theories of conflict resolution and peace studies, students are put in front of a real-world enduring conflict in a specific part of the world, with which they are unlikely to be very familiar. They are asked to come up with suggestions and specific proposals, in order to minimize and/or terminate the specific conflict under consideration. After a short period of consultation in small groups, they are asked to present and explain their conclusions, in a structured manner, to the entire classroom.

Normally, the groups are not able to present sophisticated reconstructions of the conflict and adequate solutions to it. In an ideal situation, the criticisms should come directly from their fellow students. The remainder of the lecture should be devoted to present a synthetic outline of the main analytical and explanatory tools provided by theories of conflict and peace studies, as applicable to the conflict under consideration, in order to show the potential of a sophisticated theoretical framework to deal with real-world situations. The same exercise, with a different case study, should be repeated at the end of the cycle of lectures, in order to test the capacity of students to apprehend and manipulate the theoretical tools presented to them.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration my own experience of mature adult students and their learning habits, specific recommendations were discussed earlier. By integrating adult learning theory in traditional teaching methods, the ultimate goal of this exercise was to demonstrate that it is possible to develop new teaching styles. These practices are deemed to be not only more compatible with the specific needs of mature adult students, but also more effective from the point of view of teachers.

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Respect

Agnieszka Weiner

Facing the Weaknesss, Winning the Students

Martin Plesch

How to Deal with Problematic Students

Rimanté Budryté

Gaining Respect

Agnieszka Weiner

Facing the Weakness, Winning the Students

The main question that I faced as a freshman in the teaching profession was how to gain the students' respect for me and for the subject I teach. It is usually easier when you teach at small seminars, where the students are older and more focused on their studies. I still remember my first teaching experience – I was going to give a course to a group of post-graduate students, many of them much older than me, already working professionals. Needless to say, the problem of winning their respect was my primary objective. Without it, everything I taught would have been thrown into a void. I had to make myself reliable and credible, despite my young age and my speech defect.

I decided that the best strategy would be to copy the qualities I observed in the professors who taught me (see also Munthe 2003); the ones whose example awoke in me the desire to work at the university and to teach others. I thought about the features I admired: their dignified looks, their knowledge, their passion for the subject, their accessibility, the respect for the student.

All things considered, I had a blurred idea how I wanted to achieve these objectives. Moreover, all the teachers I knew could communicate without problems. I knew I would stutter – maybe this is not a major problem, since I'm rather a light stutterer, but the question remained how the students would take it and how I should react to any observations they could possibly make. The other thing was how to keep the class interesting despite the possible blocks and speech trouble. I was worried how a teacher with such a visible impairment could possibly win their respect.

The looks

The issue of looks was something I knew I couldn't possibly turn into my advantage, as I am not within the range of a Polish scholar stereotype: I look and behave younger than I am, the style accepted at the American campuses, but still hardly seen at the Polish universities. I had to adjust my behaviour to that particular group of mid-career professionals. Therefore I needed to play other features of an ideal lecturer.

The knowledge

I decided to put the most of my effort to expand the knowledge I wanted to share. I assumed that if I can show the students some new ways of thinking of the taught subject, I would get their interest and maybe they would start to respect me at least for the workload I invested in the preparation. This part of the teaching job is the most exhausting and time-consuming. I would spend long hours trying to learn something new on the subject, and then to put it in an easily digestible form, using multimedia whenever I could. I must admit the greatest challenge was to look for the materials on Internet – I wanted to avoid the situation in which my knowledge comes from the websites my students know about. So I needed to google with a critical mind.

The obvious, but the most difficult part was to prepare the structure of the course. I had no idea how to do it, so I used my research experience and approached each topic as writing a scientific article: giving theoretical structure first and then the case studies.

The equally big dilemma what would be the difficulty level. Should I offer many definitions and new concepts, or should I stick to the basics? I was not sure where the line between enhancement and intimidation lied. I heard many times from my older colleagues that young teachers are too eager and tend to overdo the assignments, readings, and discussions, and that they have no sense of what the students really know (Ernst, Ernst 2005 or Rich, Almozlino 1999). Thus finding the equilibrium is the greatest challenge.

The passion

The passion for the subject is something difficult to develop. And thus it is crucial to teach a course that you really like. This is at least what I had believed before I started teaching. And thus I was really worried about the course – like many PhD candidates, I was asked to teach a subject I really did not know how to teach and was not particularly fascinated by. So the

main problem was to stir the passion in me to show it to the students and make it credible.

First of all, even if I was genuinely bored with the obligatory reading myself, I changed the approach – I stopped considering it in the categories of “interesting” vs. “boring” but rather “useful” vs. “useless.” In the frenzy of preparing the texts to appear useful, I learnt how to become passionate about them. Then I understood that a part of the passion comes from the students themselves. Their strong feelings about some texts made me more passionate about teaching. I learnt thus an important secret of teaching – the impact of the student participation (Husbands 1996; Peacock 2002).

The accessibility

Being accessible was probably the most important part of my teaching. I am a student myself, so I understand the need to be in able to have a chance of interaction with the teacher. I decided to keep rigidly to my office hours’ scheme, and to be open for any after-class consultations. I gave the students my phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

I believe that teaching has a recipient at the end, and thus I wanted to know the interests and backgrounds of each of my students, so to be able to call on them while discussing some very narrow issue pertaining to their particular specialization. However, I am aware that such an approach would be impossible in a class of 100.

The respect for students

In whatever way I wanted to win the respect of my students I knew that the rule number one is to respect them. And this turned out to be a big challenge. I did not know if I should respect them for just who they are or for what they do. I have to admit that some things were extremely difficult for me, for example to let the students express themselves freely, especially when they were going sideways in their statements on the readings. I found out how difficult it was not to be sarcastic to them and how easy it is to inadvertently cross the line between gentle irony and meanness. I guess I found the right measure, since in the final term evaluation no one complained about it.

I tried my best to realize the above objectives. My stuttering was not necessarily the biggest obstacle to achieve my goals. I managed to somehow diminish the effect my speech had on the class through the usage and development of the abovementioned categories. On the other hand, it seemed that university is a milieu where the students are polite enough to

put up with stuttering. I believe that as for the not promising beginnings, I have managed to deal with the question of respect in a satisfactory way.

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Martin Plesch

How to Deal with Problematic Students

This lecture is exclusively based on my own experience and on discussions with colleagues and friends. Most of them are (or were) PhD students, who taught several courses at the university or at a high school for a short period. The experiences of these people are often much different from those of experienced teachers.

On one hand, a young teacher could benefit from closer contact with the students. This is because the students fall within the same age group, have common interests and often also they are friends in the same network. On the other hand, the question of gaining respect is much more important and harder to achieve. In some courses, a few problematic students make the tasks of a teacher very complicated. In this case I strongly believe that one has to find (to the benefit of the whole group) ways to establish a constructive and congenial atmosphere in the class.

Here, I will concentrate on situations where problems resulting in the loss of respect for the teacher are anticipated. I will analyze cases where one has to teach a non-popular course; tries to institute a relatively difficult criteria for passing a specific course; or where a notorious group of problematic students sign-up for the course. Another problem for first-time teachers is often how to strike a suitable balance between being friendly during lectures and reaching course goals, without losing respect. What are the possible actions to take?

I believe that the biggest challenge during the first moments of interaction comes from the personality of the teacher: his/her appearance, voice, style of dressing/clothing, and his/her first words. Unfortunately, this is the aspect one cannot do much about. It's hard to imagine transforming an inexperienced young teacher with a gentle and often weak voice, into

someone who commands respect even before he/she enters the lecture hall (not overnight at least). Much more can be done during a longer time period.

Examples from my practice

It might be interesting to start with a concrete example, in which I learned more about the reactions of individual students and those of the group as a whole. I was teaching a course at the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics, which was intended for second year students. The title of the course was “Physics problem solving at the high school level.” It was obligatory for students who wanted to become teachers of Physics, and optional for students of other majors.

As a rule, at the beginning of the second year every student has to choose two majors, i.e. the subjects he/she will have the right to teach after graduating. Signing up for courses from different faculties still seems to be, for most students, too complicated so many stick to a choice of two out of three – Informatics, Mathematics or Physics. As in other countries, Informatics is much more popular with students than the other two subjects and most prefer study only Informatics. Some of them did try to book a place on the “pure informatics” program and, becoming a teacher was, for them, just a second or third option.

As a result of this, most of the students in the group were not interested in Physics, physical problems, how to explain them to students, etc. Moreover, many of the students had a rather weak physical background, barely satisfying the minimum requirements for scientific level studies/discussions. It was very hard in this situation to find a way to motivate these students to work.

However, a few students were strongly interested in the topic. Their plan was to become good teachers of physics, be able to work with the best students in a class and learn as much as possible during their study. These students were in the minority, as information from lecturers from the previous semester indicates/confirms.

With the expectation of a slightly problematic group, I started with a very formal approach, explaining the rules of the course, the criteria for obtaining pass grades, etc. After that, one of the students came forward and tried to explain to me that majority of the group are not interested in the course. He suggested a curriculum that is less comprehensive; a course outline that is less loaded, one that they would all accept and be able to cope with. In the consequential discussion only one more student presented

himself with similar ideas. However, most people in the group seemed to accept the leadership qualities of these guys.

After two more lessons, by ignoring the homework and failing completely on the first test, it was apparent that these two students would not pass the course. I presented this fact clearly to them and asked them not to attend course seminars anymore. This event, coupled with an attempt to involve the really interested students during the seminars, brought all other members of the group to a successful completion of the course - many of them with significantly better grades than they would expect at the beginning.

After the course, I asked the students to express their opinion on the fact that I fired two of their colleagues at a very early stage of the course. Their responses did depend a lot on whether those students were still in touch with them or not. The first group considered the solution to be too strict and severe, whereas the second group considered it as appropriate. Almost all the students did admit that it helped to maintain discipline and make the course more constructive. As such, some of them believe they would probably not have been able to pass the course if those colleagues were still in the group.

As a case study, the previously described situation may have a lot of different solutions. These may vary with the type and kind of institution, field of study, age of the students, etc. In general, becoming a teacher with a lot of respect from students without to being a bugbear to the institute has always been difficult. I believe there is no general requirement/procedures to follow to achieve this and there are always situations where it is even not possible.

However, having learned from experience, like the one described above, I have brought together a few steps and or principles which when followed, will help a (young) teacher to command and maintain (rather than demand) more respect. Still, it is up to the teacher or lecturer to decide on what to use and what not and in which real world situations to do so.

Show respect

This is the first and easiest thing. It is almost impossible to gain respect without showing it to others. Viviana Cortes from the Iowa State University characterizes this especially well. "Respecting students is often expressed in simple things: showing up to class early, handing papers back on time, phrasing comments on papers politely, respecting office hours, and being available to students for advice. Respecting students also means listening. Mutual respect helps students feel confident enough to express their

opinions freely and to get involved in intellectually challenging discussion. I can be considered a very demanding teacher: academically, I always expect the best from my students, but I respect their pace and try to be there to listen to them and give them advice they can use in their academic endeavours”(Cortes, 2005).

For young teachers showing respect may also help a lot to build a small, but very useful “barrier” between them and the group of students. It may sound a bit peculiar trying to do so; but having a lecture-room where it is, for an outsider, impossible to identify a teacher is almost as bad as the extreme opposite.

Superiority

The tendency might be to show a natural superiority in all aspects of the issue/topic. From another point of view, one should at the beginning of the lecture, open only such topics for discussion where one expect to have a better and broader overview. Here, as the first point is the topic of the lecture, workshop or seminar itself, the teacher should be prepared not only to present the curriculum itself, but also to be able to answer basic questions connected with the topic. For more advanced or complicated questions, there is always a possibility to postpone the answer for the next lecture – it is better to do so than to risk a silly answer.

A problem might also when you speak too much, and end up losing the respect of students by making a few misguided statements that throw your competence into doubt. This occurrence is much more rapid than the reverse one; it often takes weeks or even months, before most students realize that there is something “great” about this teacher. Generally, discussions on topics like the weather, sports, etc, might be risky in a way, as one might not have sufficient information, or be simply less conversant with the issues than the majority of students.

Be on formal terms

Even though this depends on the country (i.e. culture and language), in general I would suggest staying formal in discussions with students during the time of their actual study. And this is another area where I have, so to say, learned from my own mistakes. It seems very fine to be friendly with students, especially when you all fall within the same age group. Being friendly could be manifested in a non-formal language and attitude. The problem arises by the first dissension, when an independent juror (say a director of a school or institute) must be involved. It becomes rather hard to abandon a usual, mutual, informal attitude or manner and get formal.

Identify problematic persons

In most groups with students who have been together for a longer time, one or two individuals emerge, to act as leaders in disrespect and rebellion. Elimination of these personalities, or rather their attempt to be disrespectful and rebellious, normally tremendously increases teacher's respect among other students. However, the effectiveness of this approach is questionable and it comes with a few risks.

Firstly, this method lacks equity and is discriminatory to some students. Teachers can judge all actions and reactions of such students more strictly (within given rules, of course). From the point of view of the student, he/she may feel unjustly treated. The rest of the group should agree with the teacher's point of view; otherwise the student gains more respect from the confrontation than the educator (teacher). Secondly, one might be wrong in identifying the person(s). This would probably lead to a situation where most of the students will defend their colleague, as they know very well who the scamp in the group really is.

Use repressive measures with caution

This is the first thing students expect – when a teacher feels he/she is losing self-respect, he/she starts to examine, test, and give bad grades and menace students. An honest teacher should be able to distinguish between the capabilities of the students in relation to the topic (for which one receives the actual grades) from the general conduct and behaviour of the student. To give a good rating to a deserving student with whom the teacher is in a conflict is just, but to use this opportunity for vengeance will be unethical and unprofessional.

Finally, if I was asked to state only one most important principle, I would say that it is best to start with a strict and rigorous way of teaching and handling students, and after a few weeks, begin with a more friendly way of communication. In the ideal case, one ends as a well-respected teacher in a rather informal community of students, where cooperation and teamwork are the main driving principles.

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Rimanté Budryté

Gaining Respect

It is not easy to know everything about gaining respect when you are 23 and already a teacher at the university. Such was my case when I started giving lectures on national and international security in Vytautas Magnus University last autumn. I was a PhD student for about three weeks when one Monday I was told that there was a sudden change of the work schedule of a very experienced and well-known teacher. On Friday I had to start giving lectures on international and national security to third year students of political science. My students were mostly 21; some of them were of my age or even older. And 80 students attended this course. An extremely low age difference between the teacher and the students complicated issues when trying to assert yourself and command respect. But I had to prepare lectures anyway, and being respected is a necessary ingredient for effective teaching.

When preparing lectures, I have followed six principles of effective teaching in university by Ramsden (2002):

1. Interest and explaining.
2. Interest and care of students and their learning.
3. Proper evaluation and feedback.
4. Clear and definite aims and intellectual problems.
5. Self-support, control and activity
6. Learning from students

Of course, everything seems different when you have to put theoretical principles to practice. I don't fully remember my first lecture. I have had public speaking experience in different national and international conferences before, but a lecture for three hours is something special and a

big challenge for a newly appointed teacher. I was afraid of almost everything; of making mistakes, of being asked questions I would not be able to answer, of being treated merely as a young girl. But the lecture ended somehow, I don't remember.

The second lecture was about concepts of peace and war – much theory on a Friday afternoon, not the best thing. As I was speaking, citing and giving examples, I suddenly began to realize that I was losing students' attention and that there was no positive feedback within the auditorium. I had to change something immediately. Thus, I switched over to a topic about “polarity of the international system” – a part of my PhD theses. I decided to present this topic because I know the subject quite well, I like the subject and moreover it is connected with international security. That was a really wise decision; students were listening with attention, they were really interested in my speech and after that lecture I started receiving positive feedback.

That was the turning point. Later, the auditorium was always full in spite of the fact that it's always in the afternoon and on Fridays. I began feeling better, stronger and more confident as a teacher. However, the most difficult situation was still ahead – mid-semester and end of semester exams. There are always students who try to cheat during examinations, and my course was no exception. But if you want to be respected, you can't keep your eyes closed when somebody is cheating. As such, some of my students ended up writing their mid-semester exams earlier than they expected. Final results varied; three students had received negative marks, but nobody complained that somebody cheated and received better marks.

After each semester our university administers a questionnaire to the students to solicit their opinion on the quality of teaching. Surprisingly the third year students ranked my lectures among the most interesting and best taught in the autumn semester. Now I have “a problem”; I am a tutor of as many as 22 semester papers and my students seem to be really interested in international relations and international security.

This semester I will give seminars on international relations to the first year students. I already have some necessary practice (training) on how to conduct a large auditorium, how to keep attention and to gain respect. But I am still learning to be a good teacher.

Theoretical background for gaining respect

When I started teaching, I read many books and articles about being a teacher. The most useful book for me was Paul Ramsden's “Learning to Teach in Higher Education.” Ramsden analyses teaching and learning in

university, different models of learning and evaluation and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

According to Ramsden (2002), the main features of a good teacher are as follows:

- Aspiration to share love for teaching subject with students.
- Ability to convey necessary teaching stuff in interesting and encouraging way.
- Ability to communicate with students in both-sides acceptable level.
- Commitment to explain what, how and why is needed to understand.
- Ability to improvise and temporize.
- Using solid methods of evaluation.
- Highest quality of feedback in analyzing students' works.
- Aiming to know from students and other sources about impact of teaching and possibilities to improve.

Aspiration and improvisation

Ramsden (2002) writes “the activity and interest of students while analyzing certain topics increases if the teacher motivates their interest and conveys his/her own interest.” A good teacher should like the subject he/she is teaching and dare to improvise. Even boring aspects like the theories may sound really interesting if they are presented with inspiration. I used this approach in my second lecture to regain the attention of students by talking about the polarity of the international system.

Also, personal experience is really important. If a teacher provides interesting details from his/her professional experience, it is an effective means of gaining respect. Personally, I have worked in a non-governmental organization, which has been spreading information about the NATO for several years. I have served as a public assistant to a Member of Parliament, visited NATO headquarters twice and, moreover, I have attended many international conferences – all these really helped me to prove that I am an expert with a lot of interest in this subject.

Besides, during my lectures, I allow some time to enable me and my students to improvise by for example, posing and responding to “what if” questions. For example, in one seminar on international relations we discussed a topic concerning NATO, and for several minutes we were improvising “what if NATO did not exist in the middle of the twentieth century.” This kind of improvisation requires knowledge of history and an ability to relate different events and situations in international relations. If students are interested and involved in the subject, they respect a teacher

who whips up their interest. It takes some knowledge of psychology to understand the needs of students and their methods of learning.

Evaluation and feedback

As Ramsden defines “using solid methods of evaluation and highest quality of feedback in analyzing students’ works” as the main features of a good teacher, I fully agree that a real challenge for a teacher is to set good questions for exams and to evaluate exam papers. Now there are different methods of evaluation and examination, so a teacher can choose the most suitable for his/her course. I have chosen a format consisting of two mid-semester and one final exams. Students have to study for a whole semester to pass mid-semester exams and at the end of the semester they would have been more prepared to pass the final exam.

Mid-semester exams are mostly test type exams and the final examination is composed from open-ended questions. The final exam constitutes 50 per cent of the final mark and the two mid-semester exams take-up 25 per cent each. After each exam, students are made known of their marks and their mistakes are always explained. Also, I definitely pay attention to students’ opinion about the structure of questions and the grading system. This is because I believe that a fair and transparent system of evaluation and a willingness to listen to students’ opinion is a good way to gain respect from your students as a fair teacher.

Conclusion

To gain and maintain respect, and to become a good teacher, it is important to study and apply different methods of teaching and learning, learn some psychology, and master the subject you are teaching. There are many useful books on effective teaching at the university. At the Vytautas Magnus University, all PhD students must attend the compulsory course in “didactics at the university” and pass the exam at the end of the course. Anyway, the only way to gain the respect of students is to practice and learn from different sources all the time.

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Synergy

Karen Henderson

Small Group Teaching in a Multinational Environment

Maria J. Garcia

The Use of Team Exercises to Develop a Positive Synergy in the Classroom

Karen Henderson

Small Group Teaching in a Multinational Environment

- An experienced teacher's view

The teaching demands made on doctoral students vary radically between different countries as the pedagogical context ranges from large anonymous lecture halls to small carefully-structured student-centred seminar classes. In the new EU member states, where political science is still a relatively new discipline, doctoral students may be required to conceive, design and deliver a whole course or module, while elsewhere they are more likely to engage in small group teaching under a course leader who will be determining the syllabus and the course teaching methods.

The considerations below are based largely on experience in the UK higher education system, where politics postgraduates commonly teach small groups who are also attending lectures delivered by a course leader. However, even where British experiences do not appear relevant, they may help new teachers reflect on some of the assumptions on which their own teaching is based.

The general challenges

It is rarely acknowledged that teaching is one of the most challenging activities undertaken by young academics. There are a number of reasons for this.

- *Teaching is probably not your primary skill.* The decision to become an academic political scientist is usually made because of ability in research

and writing. You may also be a naturally gifted teacher, but if you are not, you may face a further challenge as you have probably become used to doing only things you are exceptionally good at. Since academic excellence is assessed largely on research ability, university structures rarely admit that teaching may be the most challenging activity undertaken by a doctoral student.

- *You have little teacher training.* University lecturers have not traditionally received formal teacher training (though this is now changing in the UK). Many first year undergraduate students therefore undergo a transition from schools where final year pupils are frequently taught by the most senior and experienced teachers to universities where untrained doctoral students appear to be taking the same role. (In fact, they are not, since the function of a university seminar is not the same as that of a school class, but this may not be immediately obvious to the students.)
- *Preparation time may be short.* Temporary part-time teachers are often used to fill in gaps that emerge in teaching provision. Consequently, staff with the least experience is required to ‘jump in’ at the last moment.
- *You may not be familiar with all the course material.* Doctoral students who are keen to obtain teaching experience in order to gain a full-time permanent post are often very flexible about what they are prepared to teach, whereas – ironically – more experienced lecturers are more ruthless about avoiding teaching that requires substantial input in terms of knowledge acquisition, and hence detracts from research. Teaching less familiar subjects demands a high level of skill in focusing teaching on development of student acquisition of knowledge. This is as much of a challenge as acquiring new knowledge, but less time-consuming.

The specific challenges of multinational environment

Many talented young academics undertake postgraduate study abroad, and particularly in English-language teaching environments, so doctoral students may be teaching in a country other than their own. Such teaching environments also attract students from a number of different countries. This produces a number of challenges.

- *Familiarity with the undergraduate teaching environment.* Some doctoral students are required to teach in university systems that they have not themselves experienced as undergraduates. Consequently, they may not be wholly conversant with the expectations that their students

have of the learning process. This challenge may not be recognised in any training provided for doctoral students

- *Teaching in a second language.* Teaching in one's second language is more demanding and time-consuming. Where students talk in local dialect, or simply do not speak loudly and clearly, this can also produce challenges of understanding what the students are communicating.
- *Teaching students in their second language.* A multinational environment is also challenging because some students themselves have language difficulties. It is important to structure seminars so that such students are motivated to contribute. The teacher may also have problems gauging how effective an understanding the students have of what others are saying.

Relationship within the group

Overcoming all these challenges can be facilitated by understanding what is happening in a seminar group. Here, two principles can be of assistance.

- *DON NOT focus on your relationship with the group.* Young teachers, who may lack self-confidence and be over-concerned about their own performance, tend to focus too much attention on their own relationship with the students. This is natural, but it may not be helpful, because...
- *...What matters most is the relationship of the students with each other.* A seminar group is a community, and students are often as concerned about the impression they are making on other students as on their relationship with the teacher. All young teachers find that some seminar groups work better than others. This is because the teacher input is NOT always the key to the success of a seminar; sometimes it is determined by other factors relating to how well the students know each other.

Teaching and learning

The importance of looking at all the relationships within the teaching group can be understood by examining the crucial difference between teaching and learning.

- *Learning is more important than teaching.* Try not to worry too much about how well you are teaching. Pay more attention to the process by which students learn.
- *Focusing on YOUR relationship with the students emphasises teaching.* Good teaching is important, but it cannot be developed in isolation from the context of the seminar group. How effective seminar learning is does

not depend entirely on the teacher-student relationship.

- *Focusing on the entirety of student relationships is the key to the learning process.* Students do not only pick up cues of what is expected of them from the teacher. They will be just as influenced by the performance of the group as a whole.

Key question

Determining the relationships in the group as a whole can be helped by initially establishing some basic facts.

- *Do the students ALL know each other?* Find out whether the students are all following the same courses, and if they are used to being together in the seminar environment. Students who know each other are likely to be more relaxed about talking.
- *Are you SURE?* You may gain the general impression that the students are used to being in seminars together, but even in this case there may be a few students who come from a different background. These students could face particular challenges in the group environment.
- *Get all the students to introduce themselves.* This at least makes all students used to speaking in the seminar group.
- *Otherwise, they judge each other on their appearance.* If students do not have the chance to introduce themselves, they will be left judging each other on what they look like – not a good indication of how they can learn together.
- *Suggest what information they should give.* Students should be prompted about the information they should give.

What do you need to find out?

A few simple questions may provide you with useful background that indicates how the group may work together.

- *Names.* The most obvious initial question is to ask the students to introduce themselves by name. It can be useful to give the students folded cards to write their name on, and ask them to display their name card on the desk in front of them for each seminar. Most teachers worry about forgetting students' names (particularly after two or three weeks, when they have asked several times). In fact, however, students who do not know each other already have far worse problems learning each others' names, and may make more use of the cards than the teacher. The teacher usually has a list of names in front of them, and can ask a

student's name if they forget it; the students have less opportunity to ask each others' names. Halfway through the semester, a student may be inhibited in discussion because they do not know the name of the colleague whose comments they wish to discuss. The teacher should also have a name card. When students fill out evaluation forms at the end of the semester, it is not uncommon to discover that they do not know their teacher's name.

- *Degree course they are following.* This information gives the teacher the best indication of whether the students will all know each other. Students who are following a variety of different study programmes are more likely to need name cards.
- *Existing background knowledge.* Ask students whether they have done previous courses on allied subjects. This information may explain later differences in the amount students contribute to the seminar. Students who feel that their peers know more about the subject may be reluctant to speak for fear of appearing ignorant.
- *Expectations from the course.* Particularly where a course is optional rather than core, it is useful to know why students have chosen it. The student evaluation of a course at the end of the semester depends heavily on what they were expecting at the outset. If they have high expectations, they may be disappointed.
- *Language knowledge.* If each student speaks for a couple of minutes, the teacher can work out whether any of the students have language problems. However, students' backgrounds can be difficult to assess from their appearance, names and accents. Some students who are fluent in discussion may have weaker written language skills if they are unaccustomed to studying in a second language.

Group dynamics

A number of scenarios commonly emerge in small group teaching. If you recognise these, you will have a better understanding of why some groups learn more effectively together than others. Here again, the relationship of the students with each other is more important than their relationship with the teacher.

- *The established self-contained group.* Groups of students who are used to learning together are usually easier to teach, as they will talk more freely. However, they may also have developed problematic learning patterns: quieter and less confident students may already be accustomed to relying on the participation of others.
- *An established group plus 'outsiders'.* Where you discover that most of

the students are following a common degree programme but a few are ‘outsiders’, it is important to observe whether the ‘outsiders’ are reluctant to contribute. Name cards can be particularly useful for these students.

- *A group with two factions.* Seminar groups which mix two groups of students who are used to studying together can have the most complex group dynamics. When sub-dividing the group for work in pairs or smaller groups, it is usually better to mix the ‘factions’.
- *Dominant personalities.* Confident students who enjoy talking can be of great assistance to the seminar group. The teacher must, however, exercise judgement on two issues: firstly, whether they are dominating to the point that they discourage other students’ participation, and secondly, whether the contributions are useful and appreciated by other students.

Coping mechanisms

Once you have basic information about the seminar group and have identified its specific challenges, you need to develop strategies for meeting them.

- *What do you do with students who cannot follow everything?* Where students have language difficulties, there is a dilemma: will the student be encouraged in their studies if you prompt them to speak, or will they feel intimidated, and tend even to miss seminars?
- *Open questions instead of closed questions.* Open questions are positive: they allow students to talk about what they know, and to express it in a language they can manage. The students can play to their strengths. Closed questions that have only one answer and require specific vocabulary are negative: they highlight the students’ weak points.
- *Structured opportunities to speak.* Students who are not fluent in the teaching language will find it harder to participate in spontaneous discussions; they will need more time to think about what they are going to say. Organised activities, where they know when they will be required to participate, can be more useful.

The purpose of small group teaching

A second key to managing effective learning in small groups is to consider two further principles:

- *Don’t focus too much on what happens during the class.* Because most

young teachers are worried about their teaching, and sometimes think too little about the other factors that influence student learning, they also tend to concentrate on their own role during the class. However, the contact hours within the classroom constitute only a small part of the study process.

- *What matters is what happens outside the class.* Far more student hours are spent outside the classroom. Effective self-study leads to successful classes, and successful classes leads to effective self-study.

Imparting knowledge or facilitating learning?

It is worth questioning what the function of small group teaching is. It is not primarily concerned with the teacher transferring knowledge to the students.

- *Lectures are for imparting knowledge.* In most university systems, the lecture setting is designed for the transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student. Here, the extent of the lecturer's knowledge is important, as well as their ability to present it in a form accessible to students.
- *Small group teaching structures and motivates self-learning...* The seminar environment is primarily concerned with managing a different process: student self-study. It enables students to discuss points they did not understand either in lectures or in their own reading; it develops students' oral skills; or it guides students' self-study while also tracking whether this has taken place.
- *...so it is the student's knowledge and not yours that determines success.* Particularly where young teachers are taking a course in a subject which is not their own primary specialization, they can be over-concerned about their own factual knowledge. If the seminar focuses on student contributions, this becomes a less crucial element. Where the teacher cannot answer a concrete question, they should be prepared to admit this, and someone in the group can seek an answer for the next session.

The key to a good discussion group

Focusing on learning outside the seminar will lead to more effective work within the study group.

- *Students who know nothing can say nothing...* Student knowledge is the basis of seminar discussion.
- *...so motivating preparation is the key to a successful small group seminar.* In leading small groups, allocating time for preparation for the

next seminar is very important.

- *The success of a small group seminar is pre-determined by whether students have prepared...* Many seminars are hard work for the teacher because if the preconditions for a good discussion are not there, little the teacher does in the small group itself can really save the situation.
- *...and whether they are comfortable enough in the group to speak.* However, even good student preparation may not be sufficient for a lively discussion if the student relationships in the group are not good.

How to motivate participation

How successful the teacher is in motivating student participation in seminars is more important for the learning process than the amount of subject-specific information the teacher possesses.

- *Be clear about the preparation required.* Students have many demands on their time. If you are specific about the preparation required, they are more likely to spend time on self-study than if there is a more open exhortation to do background reading.
- *Structure the small group seminar to reward preparation...* Students are more likely to prepare if they know that whether or not they have prepared will be evident in the seminar. Otherwise, they lack motivation.
- *...even for less confident students.* Students who prepare well but lack confidence to join in a general discussion may feel frustrated.
- *Make sure every student has their 'turn'...* Structuring the seminar so that every student is invited to speak will both motivate preparation and be satisfying for those who have prepared well.
- *...without the structure seeming too formal.* The only problem is that a very rigid format can encourage students to prepare their oral contributions in writing. Vary the structure of discussion while still making sure that all are specifically invited to participate.

Example of organised preparation and participation I

How you structure a seminar depends very much on the subject matter. The sort of format that can work well for Political Science is:

- *Allocate each student a case study with suggested reading.* In comparative politics, this might be a country study.
- *Sub-divide the seminar group for small discussions to compare the case studies...* Sub-groups can be asked a question that requires knowledge

from all the case studies. Students often talk far more in groups of four or five, and even quiet students will enthusiastically discuss what they have read.

- *...so that failure to prepare is evident, but in a less public forum than the whole group...* The student who has done no reading is in an awkward position as they have nothing to contribute to the groups' joint answer to the question, and the experiences of one case study are missing. Yet this is less embarrassing for the student than when failure to prepare is evident to the whole group – a situation that may lead to students who have not prepared missing the seminar.
- *...and the student who has weak language skills is actively encouraged by other students to participate.* In small groups, where each student has knowledge of their own case study, even quieter students are valued and helped by their peers to contribute.
- *The student who was absent last time, and hence had no case study allocated, can be asked to take notes and report back.* Small groups report back to the plenary with an answer to the question that incorporates material from all individual case studies. This task can occupy any student who, for whatever reason, has not contributed to small group discussions.

Example of organised preparation and participation II

The following format can be used where the seminar remains in plenary:

- *Allocate each student a text to review.* This is the simplest method of allocating students tasks.
- *Ask each student in turn to summarise the text and explain whether or not it was useful.* This develops students' oral explanatory skills, imparts some information to other students, and may encourage them to read further if the text is recommended as useful reading.

Challenges

Students have their own views on seminar format, and sometimes strategies that the teacher thinks are successful are not evaluated highly by students.

- *Students may complain that preparing for each seminar individually is too much work.* Although successful teachers motivate their students to work hard, some students aim to gain a university degree with the minimum effort possible. For these students, a formal qualification

rather than learning and skills acquisition is the ultimate goal.

- *The room may be too small for sub-dividing into groups.* Resources are not always what one would wish. Some seminars take place in rooms designed for lecturing, so that the students are in rows rather than facing each other.
- *Students may complain that plenary accounts of others' book reviews is 'boring'.* Many students want to be taught by the teacher and are reluctant to listen to the contributions of their peers.
- *Students may voice resentment about colleagues who have not prepared.* While many students enjoy small group work, some resent the fact that the product of their labours is weakened by other students' limited efforts. This is, however, a hurdle that has to be overcome in the workplace also.

The problems of a young teacher i

Finally, although the relationship between students is usually the key to the success of a seminar group, young teachers do face some challenges in determining their relationship with the students when teaching. No advice covers every context, but some points may be helpful.

- *Do not be too familiar, and emphasise your familiarity with the student sub-culture...* Wanting to be socially accepted by the students is often as much of a mistake as trying artificially to distance yourself from the students.
- *...or you may alienate students from a different background.* Even student groups that appear to be socially homogeneous contain many variations. If you emphasise your understanding of the student experience, you may intensify feelings of isolation felt by any student who does not fit in with the dominant group in the seminar.
- *Concentrate on the learning process and not the teaching process.* But do not worry too much about how well you are doing. What matters in the end is how well the students are doing.

The problems of a young teacher II

Whether students talk about issues other than the seminar material depends rather on the academic culture. Part-time teachers are rarely required to do any pastoral work, even in systems where academic staff deals with such issues. However, that does not mean they will not encounter some challenges here.

- *Students may discuss personal problems they are afraid to raise with others.* Particularly in university environments where lecturing staff are rather distant figures, students may feel more comfortable discussing problems with young teachers. Seminar teachers are also the most immediately accessible members of a university department.
- *Ascertain whether what they are saying is intended to be confidential.* Students talk to teachers about personal problems for a number of different reasons. Sometimes they want advice, but wish the personal information they discuss to remain confidential. Sometimes, they choose the young teacher as the easiest way to register information, for example about illness, with the university department. Make sure you understand what the student wants you to do with the information they have given you.
- *Find out in advance the system in your university for dealing with problems.* Teachers are not counsellors, and you should not be giving advice on non-academic issues to students. In some university systems, there are sophisticated systems for dealing with students' difficulties; in others, there are none. Make sure you understand what your university expects you to do when students discuss non-academic affairs.
- *Listen, but do not talk too much.* The student is not interested in your experiences. Try to guide students in the right direction to obtain help, but without getting involved in their personal problems.

In place of conclusion

There is no right and wrong way to teach. Different methods work with different students in different environments. However, remaining student-centred is helpful when – as often happens – things do not go as planned when first teaching. Do not ask what you should be doing differently. Ask yourself what you would like the students to be doing differently. Then try to work out what you can do to encourage this. The small group teacher is a facilitator of learning.

Maria J. Garcia

The Use of Team Exercises to Develop a Positive Synergy in the Classroom

Creating a positive atmosphere of trust and co-operation in the classroom is essential for the success of seminar-based teaching, where the onus is on the students to think critically, participate in discussions and provide elaborate answers to intellectual enquiries designed by the teacher. Drawing from my own experience as a seminar tutor on several undergraduate courses in Politics, this essay will, in the first section, present the role of the tutor in a student-centred approach to learning and a justification for the use of team exercises and case studies in the classrooms.

A second section will provide some real world/practical examples of this method in the classroom as well as some critical comments on their success in encouraging students to participate in the seminar and co-operate with one another. Finally, a short conclusion will present the lessons that can be learnt from these experiences and why they succeed.

The teacher as a moderator and facilitator of learning

Even before the first seminar the tutor has to decide what teaching style he/she will adopt. He/she must identify the aspects of the course that he/she feels are more important and design a method that will highlight these. I have laid significant emphasis on the acquisition of skills by my students; working together in a mature way, and how to look at each issue critically from different perspectives.

Following the view that “education is not the transmission of information to a passive learner, but rather the building and shaping of internal

resources” (Stevick 1998: 123), I adopted a role as chair and tried to fulfil the Brennan’s (1974: 107) duties for teachers:

- to set a context favourable to discussion
- encourage group identity and group loyalty
- foster in the group a commitment to the enquiry
- ensure a clear articulation of the subject under discussion
- keep under scrutiny the relevance of contributions to the discussion
- protect the divergence of views
- and to ensure that an enquiry is rounded off in a way which organises the understanding gained

Encouraging group identity and familiarity is a crucial element in this approach. A satisfactory class debate will only arise if there is trust between the students and the tutor and an atmosphere of co-operation and respect. This is essential if we are to “challenge students to think and act according to their own perceptions,” without fear of being ridiculed (Curzon-Hobson 2002: 266). To ensure this, as moderator, whenever somebody interjected with erroneous or biased information, I intervened to highlight what was good about their contribution, and inviting them to reword or clarify the information, to prevent their views from being crushed by others. In this way, a balanced atmosphere was maintained in the seminar without ridiculing any student.

Moreover, from the start of the course, and throughout, I emphasised the fact that in politics there are no right or wrong answers, and that all their views are acceptable provided they could be justified sufficiently with critical arguments and examples. The importance of this cannot be underestimated as it constitutes the centre piece of an approach based on a “pedagogy that seeks to reveal the fragility of different perspectives, and fragment perceived reality via the presentation of content through conflict and contrast” (Curzon-Hobson 2002: 268).

In order to improve this trust amongst us, I tried to balance everyone’s ideas and refrained from presenting my own as the correct one. Fortunately, this received very positive comments on students’ feedback forms. I also took care to provide some time, in the first seminar, for students to introduce themselves. I also took them out to a café for part of the last seminar before Christmas so that they could all talk in a more relaxed atmosphere and get to know each other a bit more. This is something crucial if we are to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, where students can feel comfortable with one another and the tutor, and be happy to actively participate in the seminar discussions.

Using teamwork in the classroom: Selected examples

Continuing to stimulate positive synergy in the classroom, I tried to introduce variety into the seminars. Through different group exercises, I tried to stimulate interest and prevent boredom. For some seminars (e.g. the lesson on the relative merits of India's Congress Party system), I divided the group into two debating teams. One group had to argue that the Congress party system was strong and successful, another had to oppose.

Within each group, one student is expected to act as the initial reporter and the rest were required to write a list of their ideas. After a 15-minute period, students presented their ideas to the opposing team and the debate began in which all the students were encouraged to participate. My role was restricted to ensuring that their comments were relevant, adding subsidiary questions in order to guide them to the answers and to allow for all students to part take in the debate.

The advantage of this debate method is that the students came up with the answers practically unaided. As soon as one group mentioned one item on their list, the other team was ready to use it to prove the contrary, as they had already had time to think about it. Moreover the introduction of an element of competition added excitement to the class and created an enhanced sense of comradeship between members of each team.

In another lesson, each student had to make a compulsory presentation. To prevent the rest of the group from over relying on the lead-presenter and his/her work, after the presentation, the group was divided into three smaller teams, each with the task of drawing a chart/diagram of the European Union's institutions, its inter-relationships and main tasks on a poster board, which they would later explain to their peers. The presenter was then asked to act as 'an expert consultant' to each of the teams, and I, as the tutor, supervised the work of each group, answered questions and encouraged them to pursue other areas of enquiry.

At the end of the exercise they all had a chance to see the very different diagrams that had emerged and to assess each other's representations. This proved particularly effective as it empowered the students, especially 'the expert consultant' to focus on the issues they were most interested in, and created an atmosphere where each felt they were involved in a 'real life' important task.

Another example of a classroom demonstration of the 'real world' situation was during a study of political parties' cleavages. The students were grouped according to the party they had researched and a few students took on the role of journalists. After a short interval for the groups to decide on their strategy and the main points they wish to illustrate, the 'press conference/round table' began. Role-playing proved to be very popular and

entertaining for the students. Moreover the reporters' incisive questions cornered the 'politicians' to an extent that the weaknesses in manifestoes and differences became apparent and thus the students proceeded to a critical assessment of the parties, their differences or lack thereof, which was the result I had hoped for when I prepared the seminar.

Conclusion: An atmosphere of cooperation through team exercises

The literature on educational approaches has highlighted the benefits of group tasks as a teaching method. According to Stevick (1998: 41): 'if I am the student, my place within the corner of the universe that is the classroom becomes more secure. The other centres (i.e. my fellow students), whose Universes also include this classroom, no longer appear primarily as competing for status or for the teacher's attention. They now become supportive parts of this universe at the centre of which I still sit. Then when I am able to be helpful to my fellow students, I gain feelings of satisfaction and a status which can themselves become powerful sources of reward and motivation.'

Judging from students' feedback forms at the end of the year, and also from students' own demonstrated enthusiasm during seminars, this type of approach seems very effective. Not only does the use of team exercises add to students' enjoyment of classes, but it also contributes to the development of an atmosphere of co-operation where students can actively learn from themselves and from each other, rather than passively rely on the transmission of information from the tutor. Creating such an atmosphere provides the additional advantage of increasing active participation by enabling students to know each other better and by diffusing responsibility for views and contributions between team members rather than representing the ideas of a single student.

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Gabriela Gregušová

Conclusion: Not Only Survival but Success Kit in the Classroom

Having started to teach at the university, each of the authors of the contributions has experienced different questions and challenges. In this book you could read how the first-time university teachers succeeded in solving them at their lessons or how they plan to proceed next time. Finally, in a concise summary, I would like to review the advice, strategies and tips which we find most beneficial.

The role of the university teacher

We share the belief that teaching at the university can not just be guided by the market rules. We think that teachers should prepare students for their future jobs and guide them when acquiring knowledge and experience needed for the professional career. But university is also very much about developing unique features of human beings: critical thinking for everyday life, tolerance, or creativity. These are the abilities everybody shares but without cultivating them they remain stunted and human being can not become mature. Not everybody can achieve at the highest levels, but we believe one of the roles of university is assisting in the process.

In this development, it is important that we are honest with ourselves and with our students. We should tell students that learning is a challenge. We should inform them that the more they participate in university life, the more they will gain from it. They have to understand that there is no substitute for sustained engagement with the appropriate literature and that,

with time, this becomes easier but remains rewarding. We should underline the fact that learning for its own sake is a worthwhile endeavour. And highlight the individual transformations that education should bring about. We do not have to make our courses popular by underlining that they help students to be more employable. We should expect much from the students and we can not be afraid to criticise, as well as applaud, what they have to say. Perhaps most importantly, we should recognise that not all individuals who are enrolled on university courses will agree with us or respond to our encouragement and prompting.

Course structure

Probably the first-challenge for first-time university teacher is to prepare the structure of the course he/she will be teaching or at least to adjust the structure an experienced colleague prepared before. Obviously, clear basic ideas on how the course will look like condition its future success. In order to have a good course structure several strategies are rewarding to follow.

Knowing your audience

The first task for the teacher is gathering information on students' entry level knowledge of the subject (what they know already, whether they have taken similar courses, how well they performed in related courses, etc.), their competence and level of intellectual development (ability to meet prerequisites, what academic skills they possess already, what those tasks that they can complete with ease are, etc.), their attitudes on the topics the teacher intends to cover (interest in or resistance towards various topics, prejudices, stereotypes), as well as priorities, long-term-goals and expectations (towards both content and methods). Gathering all this information can be done through a mini-survey based on a pre-course questionnaire submitted to students along with the draft syllabus during the zero-week of the semester, or during students' course registration period.

Content selection

Besides demands set by departmental curriculum strategies, the "amount" of content, its level of difficulty and the structure of it should depend on the students' ability to be partners in exploring that content. Obviously the teacher needs to have clear ideas on what knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes etc. he/she wants to develop in students with the help of the chosen content and method, but he/she also needs to adjust the strategy of "pushing through" the aims of the course to the characteristics of the

course's audience. Too much content-coverage, too fast or too slow pace, too superficial or too deep approaches would make students results that students select – often randomly or based on non-academic criteria – a certain part of the content or task, and neglect the rest.

Young teachers are often prone to put too much burden on students. For example, forty pages of very dense material every week is too heavy for many students. Also writing weekly position papers might not be feasible. Writing, say, five position papers out of ten or twelve topics including questions for discussion can be quite reasonable yet still a demanding requirement.

Aims and learning outcomes

Not telling students what they are expected to learn would leave them with the impression that they are the objects of teaching and not the subject of education. Formulating the aims of the course and the expected learning outcomes, however, should be done in a student-friendly manner. The emphasis should be on discussing what students are expected to learn rather than what the teacher wants to teach.

This can be done by assigning them a task at the beginning of the course and then again the same task at the end of it: more often than not the individual achievement is obvious, the results clearly show that the course has achieved its main learning outcomes (such an exercise would be to ask students at the very first class to define a concept, describe possible solutions to a problem, distinguish between two theories, etc. and then again ask them to do the same at the end of the semester).

Structure and content

There are several ways of structuring the same content, some of which follow the logic of the subject being taught (chronology in the case of a history course, scale of operations in case of an economics course, from local to global in case of an international relations course, etc.), or others which are based on key concepts (cognitive structures, for instance: hegemonies, revolutions, etc.). Two alternatives are starting the course with “the” most interesting or challenging issue that will be addressed during the semester or the problem-based structure whereby the content is built in such way as to gradually “arm” students with the necessary knowledge and skills they need to solve a real-life problem. For instance, the course can start with the description of a case study, and by the end of the semester all possible ways to approach that problem will have been discussed.

Another way of structuring the course is to first identify the topics that represent the core of the course and then offer additional options: *remediation* (part of the content that is offered to students who do not have the necessary background for any particular unit of the course), *enrichment* (for those who are ready to explore more a certain part of the course), and/or *choice* (special topics that satisfy particular student interests).

Assignment and assessment

The role of assessment is to give relevant and constant feedback to the students on their progress, and therefore to measure not only the “end product” of students’ learning, but also to monitor the process of learning. The knowledge students gathered and activities carried out before and outside the current coursework (if relevant to the course in question) can also become part of their assessment. Student portfolios, projects, conference participation, etc. are all possible ways of assessing what a student knows on a certain subject.

Assessment should also allow students to express their own critical thinking, therefore assessment methods measuring “divergent” knowledge (essays, reflection papers, individual proposals, etc.) should be preferred to those measuring convergent knowledge based on “right answers” (multiple choice tests, traditional written exams).

The teacher should also be aware that some assessment techniques are discriminatory against certain students. Time pressure and a stressful environment, for instance, can inhibit some students’ thinking, while others are stimulated by such conditions. Some students prefer to express themselves in a written form, others within the framework of a discussion. A combination of various assessment methods therefore is always recommended.

The syllabus

A good syllabus should show the purpose of the course, outlining how the course fits into what students know already, and how it is going to add to existing knowledge, helping students assess their readiness to take the course, showing how they will become academically richer if they take the course, underlining what is important to pay attention to, defining what is required for successful course work, describing how learning is going to be assessed and what the grading criteria are. All the information needs to be in written form, so that it can be consulted at any point in time during the semester.

Teaching students to make presentations

One of the outcomes of the course can be that students learn to prepare a presentation of some text. However, guidance is needed throughout the whole semester to train students for the final day. Otherwise, they tend to make rather chaotic presentations; moreover they often have problems to seize the essence of the text, emphasize many unnecessary details, or fail to interpret the text in a creative way, etc.

To prevent this, one week before their presentation the students can be asked to submit a one page outline of their presentation. Later, by the presentation students will lean on this outline and not the text itself. From the outlines the teacher can also detect if students succeeded in reaching the essence of the text and structure their interpretations and conclusions in a clear and logical way. Besides, the teacher may ask students to prepare a longer outline that will be distributed in the class following the presentation, and used later as notes by the others, so the audience can pay more attention to the presentation itself. The two outlines help the students to pick up the essence and structure the subject along the main lines.

Moreover, students can be asked to give their personal opinion about the given article or study that is the subject of their presentation, and also try to relate it to a current issue (local or international), while the audience has the task of giving the opinion about the presentation, explaining its strong and weak points.

It is also good to devote the second class to introduce basic methodological, rhetorical, drafting/essay writing; focus finding, text-interpretation problems. Furthermore, in order to ensure that students have grasped the core of each lesson, every class can start with a written quiz (with the student's name on it but not graded) about the subject of the previous class, and the results can be discussed at the following class. This way, the group has the opportunity to go through everything several times, and importantly, once in a written form.

Reliance on the original texts

Using mostly the original texts at the seminar might result in putting too much workload on the students. One of the solutions is to place more emphasis on the textbook, which reduces the number of pages students have to read. Despite that, it is important that students encounter ideas in the making; one should also strive for comprehensiveness. A good textbook may include not only a concise description of the major arguments of a book, but also cover a lot of the literature that followed.

Class discussion

A negative consequence of the fiery discussions in the seminar (which mostly seems as positive) can be that the material designed for the lesson is never covered. What helps is that discussion is postponed till the later part of the class. Besides, students can enter fields the teacher is not prepared to talk about. Then, it is good that the teacher frankly admits that he/she does not know the answer and gives some relevant references.

The topics for the final papers

Sometimes, the analytical methods studied in a course might create a kind of bias whereby students tend to enthusiastically apply what they learned to areas that require different techniques. The teacher must make the students aware of this. Another problem can occur when a student chooses a topic (or rather a field) he/she is not familiar with because he/she just recently started to read about it and got very enthusiastic. However, it is better to stop such attempts in the beginning, as the student simply does not have enough time to produce a high quality paper when entering a completely new field.

It is also important to devote more time to the discussion of the final paper topics and do that much earlier in the course. This is something that students are willing to postpone as much as possible. Having a seminar for presentations of ideas for final papers a month before the end of the semester can save much confusion and frustration.

Critical thinking

What matters to foster critical thinking is not so much ‘one-person presentation’, but ‘group interaction’ or debate. ‘Active learning’ really starts when students interact between each other on a similar substance. An important seminar’s requirement can be that students write short summaries of the weekly readings, as well as express comments and questions they would like to discuss in the seminar. Links with previous week seminars are always encouraged. This summary should be sent to the lecturer about 48 hours before the beginning of the seminar so that the lecturer can send an e-mail back to the students with *all* the questions he/she received. Each student then gets 48 hours to pick up one or two questions and prepare potential answers.

The role of tutorial in fostering critical thinking

Tutorials as regular meetings between teachers and students are still one of the means of instruction at some Universities. For each of these meetings the student usually has to prepare a piece of work, e.g. an essay on a specific question, a literature review, or set of problems which would then form the basis for a thorough discussion with the tutor. However, due to financial reasons many Universities ponder the existence of the tutorials.

Nevertheless, a tutorial can be very useful as it tackles very successfully the motivational problems some students may be facing, because it allows the instructor to tailor a session according to the student's interest. Moreover, in a tutorial, there is no place to hide. Every idea is subjected to critical scrutiny by the tutor and silence is not an option. Furthermore, at the tutorial students do not only engage the set text or question but are also more likely to read their way around the subject. And there are many more advantages which tutorials bring.

Still, there are solutions how to preserve the tutorial and to make it less demanding on finances and teachers' time. Instead of offering a weekly seminar for an entire class it is possible to arrange biweekly tutorials with a smaller group of students, giving them the opportunity to present pieces of work for in-depth discussion. A tutorial-style approach does not only work in a one-on-one setting. On the contrary, having two or three or more students can enliven the discussion and contribute to a debate that sustains itself without outside intervention. Another possibility for including a tutorial element would be the creation of a tutorial setting with individual students or groups of students parallel to a seminar while the group at large is engaged in another task.

Essay writing

In teaching students to deliver high-quality papers, there are also several ways that can be followed.

Exercise in essay writing

When starting the course the teacher can make an exercise to show students what kind of essays he/she expects. The teacher may choose the subject for an essay and with the students they analyze the words of the subject. After that, he/she asks the students to share all the ideas that come to their mind and deal with the subject. Then, the teacher examines with students which ideas fit well with the subject and which ones should be put

on the list. Finally, the teacher shows how these ideas could be presented in order to get a good paper.

After that, the teacher can give the students a topic for another essay and ask them to make the preliminary work, that is to say analyzing the words of the topic and to brainstorm. The teacher can speak with the students and advise them. Then, some volunteer students can submit orally their proposals: all the proposals are to be discussed in the class with all the students. After this discussion, students write a draft of the essay and every draft is corrected. To finish, the teacher can give a new topic and students have to write a new essay. Having made two or three such exercises, students usually know much better how to write a good paper.

Avoiding plagiarism

There are several possible forms of plagiarism– from borrowing of the ideas by one author to the combination of texts by several authors, and translations without any sense. It happens that students do not understand essay writing as a way how to learn something, they just see it as the unpleasant and difficult way how to pass the course. And thus they look for the solution of how to overcome their problem as quickly and easily as possible.

Even students who have motivation to study hard often do not know how to write. They do not know how to transform their ideas into an academic piece of writing, to what extent they can use the words of other authors, or how to quote and make reference. Moreover, they may lack some other skills important for writing, e.g. systematic work and timing. It is also us, teachers, who may unintentionally help spread plagiarism (by assigning students to write long essays without giving detailed instructions etc.).

When solving this problem it is necessary to explain to students the necessity of developing writing skills as such, and to show them that this acquisition can be useful for them also in the future. Then it is important to provide them with brief and meaningful instructions on searching for and selecting sources, on scientific methods they may use during their analysis, on the form and content of the required essay, and on how to quote, paraphrase and refer to sources. A meaningful thing also seems to be assigning shorter essays to the first-and-second-year students and gradually imposing more and more requirements.

Another issue is to make students work systematically during the whole semester. It could be useful to set several deadlines by which they should finish particular parts of their writing and hand in their draft to the teacher. It is good to set at least three deadlines – until the first one students should hand in the name of the particular topic, list of sources, and the main ideas of their essay; until the second one they should submit the first draft of the essay; and until the third one the final version. Each deadline should be followed by the teacher's evaluation of their individual work. On one hand this activity is time demanding for the teacher, but on the other hand it gives students feedback and guidance.

It is also beneficial to communicate with students predominately via internet. It spares time and paper, and it is a very flexible instrument in whatever sense. Moreover, when the teacher receives essays in electronic form, it may help him/her reveal plagiarism because the best and the most common source of stolen ideas nowadays is the internet. The teacher may simply copy whatever part of students' writing and check its source.

Originality and thoroughness of the papers

Students also can not be prepared to deal with some of the abstract concepts that the discourse of writing requires, such as writing for a non-existent audience. It helps to ask them to define who could be the target audience of the essays to design a specific audience that they write to.

Besides, particularly essential is to explain to students the importance of remaining themselves and using their own "voice." This requires students' confidence and teacher's respect to any opinion expressed. Once they realize that the teacher is genuinely interested in what kind of persons they are, the teacher gets a chance to receive really personal and well-thought-out argumentative essays.

To attain this aim, it is good to emphasise to students that there is no incorrect answer/statement. Or, better said, every statement is correct if well-substantiated. It is especially important in Eastern Europe where in the past totalitarian society there was only one truth and people are still used to it.

On the other hand, the teacher can experience that some students reveal absolute freedom of thought and pretend to be up to the challenge of writing on most burning topics that they, actually, know little about. Students should be guided in order to submit just papers where they understand what they have written.

What is especially important is to let the essay “mature” after it is written, and then give it a second reading and editing. It is very tempting to hit the “send” button or hand in the essay in paper, but it's definitely a good idea not only to proofread for mechanical errors, but also to consider whether there is a real point in the essay. Is it well developed? Do the ideas flow logically? The greater is the evidence of thoughtfulness, the better. The essay should show some level of sophistication, technical skill, and reasoning ability.

Originality

One possibility for how to make a course original is to introduce a case-study workshop structured around research requested by clients. The task for the students can be to assist the municipality with several local development projects. Then, during the first part of the semester, students are introduced to selected problems of the transitions. As homework, they are asked to analyze data collected by the municipality. Together with the assigned readings and lectures, these analyses serve to prepare the students for the weekly discussions about the challenges and opportunities the transition posed to settlements. At the seminar students learn how to benefit from consultation and collaboration but they also acquire analytical skills and problem solving abilities, as well as techniques for effective public presentation of their work. Thus, research requested by clients prepares students well for the job market by introducing them to real work environments.

In order to encourage students to apply original methods during the seminar or produce original works, it is necessary to express satisfaction and appreciation to those who succeed in doing that. Being appreciated by the teacher is often the best motivation. Students can bring in exciting newspaper articles, TV documentaries from a variety of countries, internet sources, maps, as well as very good multimedia presentations.

Specific teacher's tasks

Supervising undergraduate theses

In supervising a thesis, the key issue is that the supervisor finds ways to provide constructive help without making decisions in the students' place. He/she should provoke independent thinking rather than discourage and embarrass students or give the impression that the student has to follow specific advice. For example, at the beginning of the project the teacher

provides students with titles of the main books, names of leading authors, databases and academic journals relevant for their topic.

Later on he/she encourages them to find further literature themselves by checking bibliographies of main books and journals, using databases, web pages of leading scholars, etc. From time to time the teacher can check the bibliographies and point out shortcomings, e.g. missing out some important work. When it comes to public defences of the thesis it is good to discuss possible defence strategies and main comments afterwards but students have to defend their projects on their own.

At the beginning of supervision there should be explicit discussion with the student about his/her view of the supervisor's role and the distribution of responsibilities between supervisor and student. It is also useful to suggest that the student read the guide on writing theses. It also seems crucial to discuss at the beginning how the student would like to distribute the time allowance. If according to university regulations the supervisor can spend 12 hours per undergraduate thesis, then the student has to be made aware of this and can suggest his/her preferences on how much should be spent on meetings and discussions and how much on reading and commenting on drafts.

A common problem for undergraduate projects is that the student starts from very broad topics and over-ambitious research designs. The task of the supervisor should not be imposing particular direction but helping the student to articulate his/her own interests. For that purpose the supervisor has to learn more about the interests and background of the particular student. The teacher can start with a discussion of his/her broader professional interests and how does their dissertation topic fit with these broader interests. For example, how did the student get interested in the topics, what does he/she like about it, is he/she interested in related real-world problems, has he/she come across these problems in previous courses, what are his/her future plans, etc.

Besides, the supervisor has to avoid at this early stage narrowing down the topic using heavy scholarly jargon, very concrete questions about the research problem, hypothesis, etc.; open testing of student's background knowledge on his/her chosen topic and relevant literature. When a more specific research interest is defined, the next challenge for the student is to plan and organise his/her research project. For example, the student should not schedule interviews during the last month of the project. He/she should also put in deadlines when the draft chapters will be sent. Student should be aware that if he/she misses the deadlines, the teacher cannot promise to have time to comment on the work.

Another problem is that thesis writing often reveals some gaps in student's previous education, i.e. in methodology. Usually students have had their introductory methodology class in their freshman year but by the time of writing their own thesis they have forgotten most of it. Some unclear methodological issues can be clarified during supervision but students also have to repeat and check some methodological issues on their own. For that purpose the teacher can compile a list of textbooks on political science methodology for undergraduates, which they can consult.

It is also important to help students to put their dissertation into perspective - to discuss possibilities to develop their thesis topic into graduate thesis or to debate how they can use their project and knowledge obtained during writing it for their job search.

Teaching students with working experience

Similarly as to other undergraduate students, by teaching adults with working experience it is necessary to make clear, from the first day, that the success of the class is very much their responsibility. In order to ensure the reading of the assigned books chapters and articles, it is important not to be afraid to block the discussion if they did not do their homework. Especially by these students, articles or books, dealing with general trends or phenomena, are better assimilated if they contain real situations. However, by focusing the learning process on problem-solving and emphasizing the practical dimension, the teacher has to be careful to underline the necessity of a certain level of rigour and abstractness in discussion.

The most difficult barrier to overcome in mature adult education is the resistance to learning and lack of motivation to learn among students, which are not manageable by hierarchical discipline. In fact, this resistance is inherent to the teaching of mature students, because it derives from their self-concept as autonomous and self-sufficient individuals, with professional and personal experiences. Moreover, the learning of mature adults is influenced by their built-in habits and attitudes.

In order to deal effectively with these issues, the single most important recommendation is to move from the role of instructor to facilitator, abandoning a disciplinary understanding of the enforcement of academic standards. A useful device is also to provoke a cognitive shock - presenting a relevant situation for students, where common sense and conventional rules-of-thumb are likely to fail.

Respect

A good strategy when seeking respect from students is to be inspired by the qualities observed in the professors from the previous studies. A few issues on which to focus can be underlined.

The passion

Sometimes it happens that PhD candidates are asked to teach a subject they really do not know how to teach and are not particularly fascinated by. So the main problem is to stir the passion, show it to the students and make it credible. Then it is good to stop considering the topics and readings in the categories of “interesting” vs. “boring” but rather “useful” vs. “useless.” In the frenzy of preparing the texts to appear useful, one can learn how to become passionate about them. A part of the passion comes also from the students themselves. Their strong feelings about some texts can make the teacher much more passionate about teaching.

The accessibility

It is very beneficial if the teacher is open for after-class consultations, and gives the students phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

The respect for the student

It is almost impossible to gain respect without showing it to others. But this means to manage the difficult balance when letting the students express freely, especially when they are going sideways in their statements on the readings and not to be too ironic or mean. For young teachers showing respect also may help to build a small, but very useful “barrier” between them and the group of students.

Dealing with problematic students

On one side, a young teacher can profit from closer contact with the students, because of the small age difference, common interests and often also the same friends. On the other side, the question of gaining respect is harder to achieve. In some courses, a few problematic persons appear and make the role of a teacher very complicated.

For example, especially by the compulsory courses, some students can try to do minimal work hoping that the young teacher will not be strict enough to penalize them and they will somehow pass the course. They can ignore the homework and fail on the first tests. Then, it is good to tell such

students clearly (already after first few lessons) that they will not pass if they immediately will not change the performance. This helps to make the course more constructive especially for the rest of the group.

Besides, one should always try to find the appropriate way to present a topic. For example, one can have students who do not study political science and apparently are not interested in it and still must attend the course on political institutions' history which goes back to the end of the Middle-Ages. The teacher, then, can show the students which traces of this history still remain in the present political system or can make a comparison with today's situation, trying to show the progress realized through the centuries. Then, students can see that they study something which has the impact on their lives.

Superiority

The basic principle might be to show a natural superiority in all aspects. But a first-time teacher usually lacks this. A good advice is to open at the beginning only such topics for discussion, where teacher expects to have a better and broader overview. Here, as the first point is the topic of the lecture, workshop, or seminar itself, the teacher should be prepared not only to present the curriculum itself, but also to be able to answer basic questions connected with the topic. For more advanced questions there is always possibility to postpone the answer for next lecture – it might be better to do so than to risk a silly answer. A problem might be also to speak to lot and lose the respect of students by a few non-competent statements. This process is much more rapid than the reverse one; it often takes weeks or even months, till most of the students realize that there is something “in” this teacher.

Being on formal terms

It might be country (and language) dependent, but in general it is beneficial staying formal in discussion with students during the time of their actual study. It seems very fine to be friendly with students, especially when there is only a small age difference. This might be connected with a non-formal language and manner. The problem arises by the first dissension. When an independent juror (e.g. a school or institute director) must be involved, it is rather difficult to push the informal manner back to the formal one. Therefore, it is usually worth it to start with a strict and rigorous way of teaching and handling students and after a few weeks begin with a more friendly way of communication.

Identifying problematic persons

In most groups of students, who have been together for a longer time, one or two individualities arise, who act as leaders in non-respect and rebellions. Elimination of these personalities, or rather their attempt to do such things normally, tremendously increases teacher's respect among other students. However, this method is connected with a few risks. First of all, it includes a way of non-equal handling of students. The teacher can judge all actions and reactions of such a student more strictly (within given rules, of course). And the student feels inequity. The rest of the group must be closer to teacher's point of view; otherwise he/she gains more respect from the confrontation than the educator. Second, one might be wrong by identifying of the person(s). This would probably lead to a situation where most of the students defend their colleague, as they know very well, who is the scamp in the group.

Using repressive measures with caution

This is the first thing students expect – when a teacher feels a loss of respect, he/she starts to examine, test, and furthermore give low grades. An honoured teacher should be able to distinguish the capabilities of the students connected with the topic (for which one receives the actual grades) and the global behaviour of the student. To give a good rating to a student the teacher is in conflict with might bring much more than using this is an opportunity for revenge.

Personal experience and “what if” questions

When gaining respect, personal experience is important, too. The teacher may tell about interesting details from his/her professional experience (working in an NGO, serving as a public assistant to a Member of Parliament, practice abroad or international conferences). Also, it is valuable to give space for students' improvisation, for example, making predictions about “what if.” This kind of improvisation requests knowledge of history and furthermore the ability to relate different events and tendencies of the international relations. If students are interested and involved in the subject, they respect a teacher who motivates their interest. Finally, it is worthwhile to pay attention to students' opinion about the structure of exam questions and grading system. A fair evaluation system and listening to students' opinion is a good way to gain respect as a fair teacher.

Synergy

Creating a positive atmosphere of trust and co-operation in the classroom is essential for the success of seminar-based teaching. Encouraging group identity and familiarity is the crucial element in this approach. A satisfactory class debate will only arise if there is trust between the students and the tutor and an atmosphere of co-operation and respect. A balanced atmosphere should be maintained without ridiculing any student. Again, it helps to emphasise the fact that in politics there are no right or wrong answers, and that all their views are acceptable provided they are justified with arguments.

Besides, the teacher should leave some time in the seminar for students to introduce themselves. He/she can take them out to a café so that they could all talk in a more relaxed atmosphere and get to know each other a bit better. In order to prevent boredom, the teacher can introduce different team exercises: debates, presentations, drawing of diagrams and discussions based on them, role play, etc. But the key tools are the team exercises. Not only do they make students enjoy the classes, but they also contribute to the development of an atmosphere of co-operation where the students can actively learn from each other.

Small group teaching in a multinational environment

There are several useful strategies when attempting to build up the atmosphere of cooperation in the class with students from different cultures.

Relationships within the group

Young teachers, who may lack self-confidence and be over-concerned about their own performance, tend to focus too much attention on their own relationship with the students. This may not be helpful, because what matters most is the relationship of the students with each other. A seminar group is a community, and students are often as concerned about the impression they are making on other students as on their relationship with the teacher.

Group dynamics

It is also very good to know what kind of a group the students form. Is it an established self-contained group? Are there any outsiders? Is it a group composed from students of different majors? Are there two factions or strongly dominant personalities?

Teacher's responsibilities

It is also meaningful to distinguish the main tasks teacher, students and other university staff are responsible for.

Teaching and learning

First-time university teachers should also worry less about how well they are teaching. It is worthwhile to pay more attention to the process by which students learn. So teacher should not focus too much on what happens during the class. Because most young teachers are worried about their teaching, and sometimes think too little about the other factors that influence student learning, they also tend to concentrate on their own role during the class. However, the contact hours within the classroom constitute only a small part of the study process. Effective self-study leads to successful classes, and successful classes lead to effective self-study.

The key to a good discussion group

Focusing on learning outside the seminar will lead to more effective work within the study group. Unfortunately, students who know nothing can say nothing. Student knowledge is the basis of seminar discussion, so motivating preparation is the key to a successful small group seminar. In leading small groups, allocating preparation for the next seminar is very important. By motivating participation the teacher should be always clear about the preparation required.

Discussion about personal problems

Particularly in university environments where lecturing staff are rather distant figures, students may feel more comfortable discussing problems with young teachers. Seminar teachers are also the most immediately accessible members of a university department. However, teacher should make very sure whether what students are saying is intended to be confidential. Students talk to teachers about personal problems for a number of different reasons. Sometimes they want advice, but wish the personal information they discuss to remain confidential. Sometimes, they choose the young teacher as the easiest way to register information, for example about illness, with the university department. But especially, the teacher should find out in advance the system of the university for dealing with problems. It is good to guide students in the right direction to obtain help, but without getting involved in their personal problems.

* * *

With this advice this volume has reached its end. However, I am sure that there are still many other questions first-time university teacher may ask. But there is no other advice than to wish to be a good teacher and moreover to continuously study and practice. As Mahátma Gándhí said “the biggest aspiration shall always come true.”

2nd epsNet Workshop for First-time University Teachers

Call for Papers

Dear doctoral members of epsNet,

this is a general call for papers for the 2nd epsNet workshop for first-time university teachers, which will take place during the plenary conference of the European Political Science Network in Paris on June 18th 2005. The workshop *Political science doctoral studies and students in Europe* shall have a form of the semi-plenary session at the Paris conference.

The workshop originates from the recognition that teaching is often an ignored area of professional development for doctoral students even though as (future) academics they are expected not only to contribute to scientific knowledge as researchers but also to the education of the younger generations as university teachers. Therefore, the organizers hope to fill this gap and offer an opportunity for young scholars not only to learn from experienced professors but also to discuss their personal teaching experience with other political science doctoral students from all over Europe. The primary aim of the workshop is to make university students more conscious of their in-class performance by discussing and explicating problems they face in teaching.

The workshop shall have two parts. First, three experienced university teachers (Karen Henderson from Leicester University, Mátyás Szabó from Central European University Budapest and Martin Plesch from the Slovak

Academy of Sciences) will lecture on some aspects of teaching. Then, the workshop will continue in a seminar format where doctoral students can discuss their problems with each other and the three lecturers.

Topics of the workshop

The workshop shall be focused on several key issues:

- Course structure: How to elaborate a good structure of a course?
- 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 gain student-acceptance as a teacher?

Guidelines for applications

Students who wish to participate in the teacher-training workshop should apply by an essay of approx. 1500 words. The organizers are looking forward to receiving essays that discuss the personal experience of young university teachers with regard to the advantages or disadvantages of some original teaching method they have used or, more generally, problems (and attempted/successful solutions to them) that they have faced while teaching. The essay should be preferably focused on the following topics: Course structure, Argumentation, Essay writing, Synergy, and Respect. However, essays on other teaching-related issues will also be considered for admission. Applicants are requested to consult with the organizers on the topic of their choice for the essay to ensure a variety of topics for the workshop.

The essay should be set in Times New Roman font, size 12, double-spaced and sent in rich text format (.rtf). In case applicants are to turn to journal articles or books in their essays, adequate referencing is expected. The essay should also have a title and the body of the text should be divided into parts, using subtitles.

Essay proposals and the final version of the paper should be sent to pphsie01@phd.ceu.hu. The deadline for final submission is March 15th, 2005.

Financial support for 15 PhD students

EpsNet will provide a per diem support for 15 PhD students participating in the workshop. The admission committee will award financial support to the authors of the most original essays.

In addition, workshop participants will have the opportunity to attend all other workshops of the epsNet annual conference.

Publication from the workshop

The best essays of the doctoral participants, along with the papers given by the lecturers and a concluding report of the workshop proceedings will be published at the epsNet web page. The coordinators are currently seeking funding to publish the output in hard-copy format as well.

The preliminary version of the report from the 1st workshop for first-time university teachers (Prague, June 2004) is available at:

<http://www.fses.uniba.sk/staff/gregusova/English/doc/report5.doc>

Eszter Simon and Gabriela Gregušová
Organizing team

List of Participants

2nd epsNet Workshop for First-time University Teachers, Paris, June 18, 2005

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Oda van Cranenburgh: Leiden University, Netherlands

Jan Drahoukoupil: Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

Vladimíra Dvořáková: University of Economics, Prague, Czech Republic

Paul Furlong: Cardiff University, UK

Andrea Glavanovics: Kodolányi University College, Székesfehérvár,
Hungary

Magali Gravier: University of Salzburg, Austria

Stephanie Laulhé- Shaelou: Intercollege, Cyprus

Anna Maciejczyk: University of Stefan Wyszyński, Poland

Andrea Schlenker: Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

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
2. Gabriela Gregušová (ed.), *How to Teach Political Science? The Experience of First-Time University Teachers 2.*, Budapest, epsNet, September 2005 ISBN 963-867-902-6

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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This volume reports the proceedings of the second annual workshop for first-time university teachers, held in Paris in June 2005. [...] Workshops such as these are vital to the discipline. They remind us that the excellence we achieve in political science research is limited if we do not couple this with excellence in the way we teach political science to our students - from undergraduates to doctoral students. [...]

I hope that the workshops for first-time university teachers will be an ongoing project for epsNet and continue to find new participants and partners in the future.

Lori Thorlakson

Member of the EpsNet Executive Council

How to Teach Political Science? The Experience of First-time University Teachers, volume 2 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 the contributors – first-time university teachers and more seasoned professors – answer such questions as:

- How to make students more active?
- How to make students to think critically?
- How to reach a scholarly 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?
- What is the role of the university teacher?
- How to create a good course structure?
- How to supervise theses?
- How to teach adults with working experience?

This volume is a result of the workshop that was organized by the European Political Science Network (epsNet) in June 2005 in Paris. It aspires to give help to those of us who have just stepped on the pass of becoming teachers of political science to be competent, committed, esteemed and, above all, original teachers.