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Every single class I have taught has two overarching goals: I want students to learn deeply about the topic through engaging in critical thinking, and I want to increase the level of interest that students have in politics. Throughout my experience of being a T.A. at Indiana University, being an instructor of record for four different classes, and now two years as a visiting professor at Miami University (OH) I have learned a great amount about the time and effort it takes to succeed in the classroom. I had the privilege of attending a liberal arts college where teaching was heavily valued, and I take the craft of teaching seriously by continually thinking about how I can improve my courses.

One of the first things I tell students in my classes is that facts are important, but without context they are meaningless. Thus, it is a goal of mine that students learn to understand the context of the American political system in order to understand more fully why the facts matter. I have done this in a few specific ways that encourage students to think more deeply about the issue at hand.

In each of my classes I start the day with the "big question" and ask students to either discuss the issue with a classmate or write down an answer to the question. For example, in my U.S. Congress class I asked, "Why do Americans dislike Congress as a whole but keep electing the incumbent?" I have found this to be a good way to get students involved in discussion but also to think about why the material for that specific day matters for the class; and, it also allows me to understand where students are at and if there are areas I need to focus on throughout the class.

Another example of encouraging critical thinking is how I have taught U.S. Public Opinion. On the first day of class I tell students one of the questions on the final essay: What is public opinion? Does public opinion matter? Why or why not? Then, throughout the course I routinely ask students to define public opinion and decide if it matters. Of course, one can arrive at different answers through a variety of methods, but this big question to the course allows students to keep the theoretical importance of the class in mind even as we discuss the basic facts on any given day.

A final example of how I try to encourage critical thinking skills is a project that I employed in my U.S. Campaigns and Elections class in the Spring 2015 semester at Miami. Students worked in groups to complete a campaign commercial about the 2016 presidential election of their choosing. We had a classroom (and faculty vote) for several different categories: funniest ad, most informative ad, best positive ad, best negative ad, best use of visual cues, and best use of auditory cues. The students loved doing this project because they were allowed to be creative and it was something different from a standard class. The teaching page on my website has a link to the top two voted videos.

However, I also had each student turn in a 5-7 page paper about decisions made throughout the process of creating the advertisement. I asked them to think about our knowledge of what works for campaign advertisements and how their advertisement aligned with this knowledge. I asked students to also discuss the weaknesses of their advertisements compared to our knowledge of campaign advertisements. Thus, I used a project that students enjoyed in order to get students to think more deeply about the true impact of advertisements in a modern campaign and why it is that negative ads are so pervasive even as Americans

claim to abhor them.

The second primary goal of my teaching philosophy is that students will have a greater appreciation for the material after the class. I vividly remember not being a good college student in my general education classes at Taylor University. I know that many students are not mature enough to put a large amount of effort into classes they are not inherently interested in. Thus, I want to encourage students to think about the importance of politics in everyday life, but also to be more interested in the material after leaving the class.

One of the ways I have tried to do this is by encouraging classroom discussion, but also through the use of what I call "Five Good Minutes". I had the opportunity to work on a syllabus collection project with Margie Hershey ([click here for link](#)), and Susan Roberts from Davidson University incorporates this in her classes. Students really enjoy having the last five minutes of class carved out for questions about the class, about college life, politics, or anything else that interests them.

Another way that I have tried to increase student interest in my primary general education class (American Political System at Miami) is through less lecturing and more simulation work in class. For instance, I explain how different the Articles of Confederation was compared to the Constitution. Students are able to quickly see flaws and differences between the Articles and the Constitution. This allows me to transition students into a conversation about the difficult decisions made during the Constitutional Convention through a conversation about the Articles of Confederation, which many students have never really studied.

A final way I have attempted to encourage student interest is to generally encourage classroom participation. I want students to feel comfortable asking questions and engaging in classroom discussion. Through the use of these questions each day I encourage participation and get students to ask questions about the material through the lens of the big picture question. One of my favorite evaluations was when a graduating senior, who took the general requirement course in his last semester, said that he chose to come to class everyday because he learned something new and enjoyed the class, even though this freshman level class was the last requirement he had for a political science degree.

I enjoy teaching students because I get to recreate the passion that I have for the study of politics with each new class and get to think about topics I have studied for numerous years in a different light. I sincerely believe that good teaching leads to more engagement in research because it allows me to connect with the material repeatedly. I am eager to discuss my teaching philosophy with you more.