TLC at APSA 2021: Teaching Pluralism through Political Science Education, In Review

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The Teaching and Learning Conference is a community of educators, scholars, practitioners, but most of all, collaborators who love to share best practices and discoveries in the art and science of political science education. TLC is a space we hold at APSA's Annual Meeting and at our stand-alone conference, to be held next in 2023, where we welcome new members into our community of passionate educators but also where we support and sustain the passion for education itself in attendees from a diverse range of institutions, reminding us both of how much we have in common as well as that there is no one size fits all technique.

The 2021 Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) within a conference was held Saturday, October 2nd in Seattle, WA. Following the format of the full APSA Annual Meeting, TLC at APSA was a hybrid conference. There were several workshops and panel sessions held online and in-person, as well as an evening reception. Our keynote by incoming APSA president, John Ishiyama, was live-streamed for virtual attendees to enjoy along with those attending in person.

Our theme this year was pluralism which we hope was reflected in the structure of the day. In our call for proposals, we wrote:

> We perceive pluralism, in the widest possible way, to represent a diversity of ideas, experiences and identities. Teaching pluralism builds classrooms and environments that encourage students to develop a deeper understanding along with tolerance of diverse ideological thought. It looks to create communities inclusive of experiences across the spectrum of human abilities, gender identities and sexual orientations. It makes space for the identities and aspirations of members of varied ethnic, religious and linguistic communities.

We were delighted that our panelists took our call seriously. Each workshop, track, and panel represented the diversity of people, ideas, and approaches present in our discipline. Our presenters' commitment to pluralism ensured that all of the tracks addressed ways to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom.

Our other goal was to ensure virtual and in-person attendees would have multiple options in each section of the day to ensure the greatest accessibility to the conference for all. Traditionally, TLC events ask presenters and participants to follow a single thematic track throughout the conference, but this year's hybrid conference allowed attendees to select panels based on format and interest.

We owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who made the conference a success: the organizing committee, APSA staff members and leadership and the Political Science Education section who planted the seed that grew to become TLC and for their continued support.

Above: Teaching and Learning chairs Patrick McKinlay (left) and Tavishi Bhasin (right), at the APSA Annual Meeting in 2021.

Diversified Approaches to Simulations and Games

RENÉE VAN VECHTEN | UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS

Simulations, games, and other forms of active learning can promote intellectual growth and have visceral learning impacts as the participants in two sessions of "Diversified Approaches to Simulations and Games" made clear. The six presentations and follow-up discussion in this track took place in back-to-back sessions: one online and one in a hybrid format (partly online and partly in-person).

Active learning exercises of variable length can be designed and tailored to teach key concepts or lessons requiring various degrees of commitment, from low-stakes close observation to

higher-order problem-solving. They can range in duration from a few minutes to an entire academic term. Several basic types of active learning mechanisms were discussed during both sessions: short exercises, games, simulations, and variations on these prototypes.

Discussant Victor Asal (University at Albany-SUNY) clarified that an exercise is an interactive tool usually designed to teach a single concept or cluster of concepts, or to convey a lesson through a short activity and follow-up discussion. These can encompass a simulation or a game but need not be either. For instance, Hal Tagma (Northern Arizona University) detailed an exercise (also recently published in PS) that demonstrates the concept of territoriality. Two volunteers are asked to stand at the front of a classroom and are invited to speak with each other casually. After two minutes the professor asks them to freeze in position and then delves into theoretical explanations for human behavior, presenting visuals such as a "bird's eye view" diagram of typical body angles and using his volunteers to illustrate ownership of space. Quick demonstrations such as these can be used to initiate wider classroom discussions about the usefulness and limitation of certain theories in international relations and can create opportunities for students to offer critical perspectives.

In simulations, students play a role or assume a specific identity in order to learn by doing or completing tasks during an allotted period of time; lessons become clearer through action, structured discussion, reflection, and related assignments. Although simulations by nature cannot replicate all aspects of reality, the experience of role-playing provides the benefit of testing concepts situationally.

Nayma Qayum (Manhattanville College) considered how centering marginalized people's lived experiences and testing core disciplinary concepts can occur through a simulation that she designed for her class. Students assume character roles in the fictitious country of "Andor" for several class periods; they form coalitions and react to scenarios designed to challenge their assumptions about power and "the other" as defined by ethnicity, religion, and other forms of identity. Students write, present, negotiate, and vote on a new constitution for Andor to conclude the simulation. Courtney Chenette (Hollins University) explained how daily simulations in her Voting Rights class allowed her to reproduce the situations she encountered as an elections lawyer, including ballot challenge arguments and ballot counting dilemmas.

Finally, the defining feature of a game is that the participants work to achieve a stated objective and the activity produces one or more winners. Gamification of simulations is possible as with Statecraft or other online multi-player games in which players assume roles that they inhabit for the duration of the exercise. John Tures (LaGrange College) explained how he created an online Model United Nations event during the COVID pandemic. His paper documents how he and his college students met the challenge of designing complex international scenarios that could result in wins and losses, and they successfully launched a virtual "Choose Your Own Adventure" MUN experience for high schoolers.

Ed Hally (Ferrum College) created a zombie game for state and local politics courses to help students grapple with issues such as public order, infrastructure, regulation, and how to puzzle through dilemmas created by a federal system. Because students

assumed a hypothetical government position (as in a simulation), produced papers (as in an exercise) but points were awarded for exercises and winning embedded games (short games were included and points were totaled at the end of the simulation), Zombie Federalism demonstrates how exercises, simulations, and games can be combined to achieve specific learning objectives. Hally measured student knowledge and attitudes to assess learning outcomes, reporting that the activities appear to increase appreciation for government officials and their decision-making processes, effects that are pronounced among non-political science majors and others who begin class with a low interest in and a negative regard for politics.

Petra Hendrickson's (Northern Michigan University) hybrid model also incorporates active learning in an extended exercise. A "flagship" project for her introductory international and comparative politics courses is modeled after fantasy football, a multi-player game in which participants create and manage a team. In a similar fashion, students select countries, empires, and regional organizations to form a "team" that they follow throughout the semester, and individually they create progress reports based on data they analyze (although teams do not compete). Assessments indicate that students can build significant knowledge about regions and countries as well as the historical trends and international issues that affect them.

Technical difficulties truncated the discussion of papers in the latter session, but the online participants explored the efficacy of active learning and encouraged further assessments of the ways these designs might influence different kinds of students (e.g., introverts, students from underserved populations, or non-political science majors) both pedagogically and personally. Discussants raised issues about the feasibility of technology and the importance of personal reflection in the learning process, and panelists offered advice about how to adapt their in-person simulations for a virtual modality. Contributions to this track augment an ever-growing body of teaching strategies that have the potential to create more inclusive and engaging learning environments, a common objective that was explored throughout the conference.

Technology and Innovative Pedagogy in the Classroom

JULIO F. CARRIÓN | UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

This track focuses on the use of technology and pedagogical innovations in the classroom. Rapid technological change and the adoption of virtual and hybrid teaching modalities provide unique opportunities to reflect on the classroom of the future. This track hosted two panels, both dealing with how to better engage students in the learning process while improving their analytical and writing skills. Despite the challenges of a hybrid conference, the presentations offered innovative ways to improve students' research and writing skills and provided important reflections on how to manage difficult conversations in the classroom.

The in-person panel was entitled "Making It Real: Taking Action in Teaching," and focused on how to turn the classroom into an active learning environment that teaches students important skills and encourages collaboration and deliberation. One important question was how to create a classroom environment that

promotes courteous but honest deliberation? In their presentation, Kara Dillard (James Madison University) and Kara Lindaman (Winona State University) argue that "niceness," frequently used by students to reduce confrontation, can lead to unsatisfactory deliberation. Social pressures in the classroom can compound the problem by creating uncomfortable conditions for students who hold minority views. Dillard and Lindaman suggest that the use of a cross-campus online deliberative forum can be an ideal way to overcome these obstacles in the classroom. They discuss how instructors can use the National Issues Forums for this purpose.

Bobbi Gentry (Bridgewater College) showed how instructors can appeal to active learning techniques to encourage community engagement. She reports how she transformed her State and Local Politics class to have students participate in a multi-staged project that looks at homelessness in Harrisonburg (Virginia). After spending the semester analyzing its causes by listening to experts and talking to local actors and organizations, students were expected to come up with a set of recommendations. Surprisingly, Gentry reports, students decided not to present them in front of local officials and instead wrote individual papers. Another experiment in how to combine active learning and analytical skills in the classroom was reported by Sean Kelly (California State University Channel Islands). He reformulated his introductory American Politics class to add a mandatory lab component. The labs were assigned primarily as a pedagogical tool, to reinforce concepts learned during the lectures, but also to provide quantitative literacy and drive the point that assertions need to be supported by evidence. What is remarkable is that this lab component, as well as the class lectures, were all done virtually, given the pandemic.

The second panel, conducted virtually, was entitled "Opening Up the Playbook: Broadening Approaches to Teaching Political Science." The two papers presented provide thoughtful as well as practical advice on how to develop or improve specific courses in the curriculum. For those interested in designing a community engagement class, David Hurley, Kayla Isenbletter, and Elizabeth Bennion (all with Indiana University South Bend), offered an important review of articles on the topic published in PS: Political Science and Politics over the past decade. They pointed out that the global rise of populism and nationalism require from educators a forceful commitment to teaching civic engagement "in order to cultivate constructive citizenship." By offering this literature review, they identify the themes, methods, and strategies associated with community engagement courses. They also offer useful and practical advice on how to leverage institutional resources for creating innovative courses. The other presentation, by Levente Szentkirályi (University of Colorado at Boulder), focused on the use of new technologies to improve the way instructors offer feedback and, in the process, improve learning outcomes. He focuses on how to improve feedback mechanisms in writing-intensive courses. Szentkirályi identifies the challenges that instructors face when providing written comments to students' draft papers. He argues that students' writing is not necessarily improved by these written or typed comments due to a series of factors. He mentions that the impersonal nature of these comments frequently leads to less optimal outcomes because students feel that their writing is not taken seriously and therefore feel unmotivated to improve. Szentkirályi walks us through alternative ways we can improve our comments in a way that motivates students. He shows how we can use technology, combining digital styluses and screencast software, to provide feedback that is aural, clearer, and provides a more intimate feel to the comments instructors make. He provides an initial statistical analysis that suggests that screencast feedback generates better improvement in student writing than the feedback that relies on typed comments.

New Strategies for Teaching Effectiveness and Civic Engagement Education

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It was clear from this year's Teaching and Learning Sessions on "New Strategies for Increased Teaching Effectiveness," "Multiple Methods for Civic Engagement," and "Out of Your Chair and Into the Streets: Active Approaches to Civic Engagement" that political scientists and colleagues in allied disciplines are open to meeting the challenges of the day while at the same time maintaining their commitment to teaching effectiveness and the rigors of systematic theoretical and practical investigation.

One challenge faced by the political science teacher explored by Stefan Kehlenbach (University of California, Riverside) in his "The Biopolitics of Ed Tech" paper and the discussion that followed is the increased role that proprietary educational technology plays in higher education classrooms. Technologies from those that allow the posting of class assignments, readings, and data set analysis, to those that track student responses to assignments and provide platforms for student research, discussion, collaboration, and monitoring, offer both potential educational benefits and potential abuses of student and instructor information and responses.

Though value is created by educational technologies, it is not always apparent how that value translates into meaningful student learning outcomes rather than the commodification of information into manageable bits and bytes of data that is manipulated and reproduced without real critical thinking taking place upon the part of the student or instructor. Teachers of political science are keenly aware that teaching technologies, which can quickly undermine a student's sense of efficacy in the world outside the classroom, have the potential to limit active student learning.

To counter the idea that students are simply passive learners and have no real interest in contributing to democratic discourse, civically engaged learning, and the workings of the electoral process, papers by Lynne M. Chandler-Garcia (US Air Force Academy) and Stacy G. Ulbig (Sam Houston State University) "Students as Teachers for Political Discourse" and Michael J Illuzzi and Nafisa Tanjeem (Lesley University) "Doing Intersectional Feminist Community-Engaged Learning in the Neo-Liberal University," offered a variety of engaged approaches to teaching political science that drew students into the world of ideas, case studies, debate, and civic education that involved the student's whole body and attention. Shannon McQueen's (West Chester University) paper on "Facilitating Impactful Civic Engagement with Meta-

cognitive Questions" explored how using metacognitive activity wrappers can improve student learning outcomes from civic engagement. In their paper, "Building Community to Promote Civic Engagement in an American Government Classroom," Scott Spitzer (California State University, Fullerton) and Lori Weber (California State University, Chico) invited public policy makers into classroom town hall meetings where students had the opportunity to participate and pose questions. Students in the class with the town hall meetings demonstrated a higher increase in feelings of political efficacy and a sense of collaborativeness compared to a class without the meetings. In "Bring a Chair: Getting Methods Students Out of the Classroom and into the Field," Douglas Cantor (Loyola Marymount University) took students out of the classroom to help organize exit polling for a course in quantitative methods in political science. In all these papers, teachers of political science and civic engagement related courses agreed that putting students to work turning theory into practice worked to increase student involvement in their own learning outcomes.

The panelists in "Out of Your Chair and Into the Streets: Active Approaches to Civic Engagement" explored themes of inclusivity in civic education and service learning. Kathleen Cole's (Metropolitan State University) paper "That's our house! Let's take it over!: Antiracist Pedagogy in Advocacy Courses," shared insights from her advocacy state government course. She guides students throughout her course to identify, track, research, and engage with a policy proposal being actively considered by the Minnesota State legislature. Her paper reflected on the different ways an anti-racist, reflective instructor approach built an inclusive space in her open-enrollment, diverse, urban college campus environment. This approach allowed her students to work through challenging problems that can arise when asking students to attempt to affect legislation shaping their community - problems such as helping students recognize themselves as knowledge experts, grappling with emotional and political toll of winning only partial, incomplete victories, and developing their own self confidence to enter the state government and present to elected officials. Andrew Hewitt Smith's (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) "Service Learning at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSIs)," advanced our understanding of how political science educators can best structure service-learning programs within their introductory courses. Noting our current literature studying service learning course and programs has been limited to predominantly white

Above: (Left to right) Michelle Deardorff, Alison Rios McCartney, J. Cherie Strachan, Carlos Huerta, and Renée Van Vechten at the APSA Annual Meeting.

institutions, he used his Introduction to American Government course at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley to examines how applicable the existing service-learning pedagogy is to HSIs and suggests ways in which pedagogy can be improved to mesh with the unique nature of HSIs.

The question of how to move beyond the "banking model" of learning, where students passively take in information rather than pushing the boundaries of what they thought they knew was at the heart of this year's session. At the center of these track sessions, as exemplified in the discussion that followed Nandini Deo (Lehigh University) Julie George (CUNY, Queens College) Meg Guliford (University of Pennsylvania) and Mary Anne Mendoza's (California State Polytechnic University, Pomona) paper "Teaching Comparative Politics: A Guide to Making Choices," was a consensus that there was no one method or pedagogy to accomplish student learning in political science but rather that there were a plurality of methods and pedagogies open to teachers and students of political science and civic engagement alike.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges of a hybrid mini-conference, attendees at the 2021 TLC at APSA valued the opportunity to come together both virtually and in-person to share in conversations focused on teaching and pedagogy. The 2021 TLC at APSA was the fourth mini-conference and it continues to be a space for political science educators to engage in meaningful connections with each other.

We would like to express thanks to the TLC at APSA Program Committee for their hard work and dedication: Tavishi Bhasin (co-chair), Patrick McKinlay (co-chair), Kenneth Betsalel, Julio F. Carrión, Chiedo Nwankwor, T.M. Sell, and Renée Van Vechten. ∎

BOOKS BY OUR MEMBERS

Qualitative Comparative Analysis: An Introduction to Research Design and Application
Patrick A. Mello
Georgetown University Press

A Tale of Two Parties: Living Amongst Democrats and Republicans Since 1952
Kenneth Janda
Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Writing As A Performing Art: On Taking it to the House
Thomas E. Cronin
Abuzz Press