

Hippies, Feminists, and Neocons: Using *The Big Lebowski* to Find the Political in the Nonpolitical

J. Wesley Leckrone, *Widener University*

ABSTRACT Films used for political science instruction are typically political or historical and are selected to examine concepts developed by the filmmaker within the context of a curriculum. This approach may not be appropriate for introductory American government classes given students' weak foundation of political knowledge and lack of interest in politics. This article examines an alternative model of film use employing the seemingly nonpolitical film *The Big Lebowski*. Viewed early in the semester, the film highlights the ubiquitous presence of politics in society and government's relevance to everyday life. Clip montages of the movie characters were used to enhance discussion of the First Amendment, voter identification, social capital, and foreign policy throughout the semester.

Visual images, particularly films, have been shown to enhance students' understanding of political science concepts discussed in the classroom (Kuzma and Haney 2001; Lieberfeld 2007; Simpson and Kausler 2009; Sunderland, Rothermel, and Lusk 2009; Ulbig 2009; Waalkes 2003; Weber 2001). A burgeoning literature examines the positive effects of using individual movies or television shows to develop themes and concepts integral to the learning objectives of specific courses (Beavers 2002; Deets 2009; Hunter 2005; Lindley 2001; Thomassen 2009; Webber 2005). However, these methods often presuppose students' knowledge base, interest in politics, and developed critical thinking skills that are typically not endemic to first-year, nonmajor students in introductory American government classes. This article develops an alternative method of film use that circumvents these problems by using a nonpolitical comedy to promote an understanding of government's role in society and to contextualize discussion of abstract concepts throughout the course. The model assumes a minimal knowledge of, and interest in, government.

USING A NONPOLITICAL FILM TO SPUR INTEREST IN THE POLITICAL

The majority of college students display a lack of interest in politics (Longo and Meyer 2006, 5–6). A 2011 study of college freshman shows that only 32.8% believe keeping up with political affairs

is important and that 19.8% believe it is important to influence the political structure. Further, only 30.8% claim to frequently discuss politics (Pryor et al. 2011, 26, 39). On these measures the current college population of "Millennials" born after 1985 shows less interest in politics than students in the 1960s (Galston 2001, 219). There has been a slight increase in interest over the previous generation, perhaps the result of an increase in attention to civic engagement in high schools (Kiesa et al. 2007, 8–11). However, young adults' focus on volunteering may be an alternative to political engagement. This age cohort values working in their community because they can see the tangible effects of their activities as opposed to trying to affect "public institutions whose operations they regard as remote, opaque, and virtually impossible to control" (Galston 2001, 220). The focus on localistic civic engagement may detract students from the need to engage in political activities that address larger-scale policy problems (Zukin et al. 2006, 200). Consequently, this generation shows a disposition toward participation, but they need to be persuaded to use the democratic process to achieve change (Venters 2010, 6–7). This article addresses the use of one pedagogical method to help students understand the relevance of government to their daily lives.

Courses that address issues related to government and policy are correlated with increased interest in politics (Hillygus 2005, 36–40). Politically related curricula are more successful when engaged in active learning aimed at students who are often disinterested and withdrawn in an introductory course (Ulbig 2009, 285). Film is one means of stimulating interest and engagement in class. Students' reticence about politics is compounded by a

J. Wesley Leckrone is an assistant professor of political science at Widener University. He can be reached at jwleckrone@widener.edu.

lack of foundational knowledge of civics and US history. This combination often results in students not possessing the tools or inclination to understand political films although they enjoy the medium (National Center for Education Statistics 2011a, 36–40; National Center for Education Statistics 2011b, 37–41).¹ Consequently the use of a *prima facie* nonpolitical film in class is advantageous because it does not require preexisting factual awareness or an interest in politics. Rather, it can create a knowledge base. Kennedy, Senses, and Ayan argue that while the entertainment value of movies is often perceived to have a depoliticizing effect, “the power of pleasure in movies can also be utilized for the reverse purpose . . . to create political consciousness and social awareness” (2011, 3). Although the film’s intent may not be political, “[t]he ideas contained in movie stories provide a rich source of cultural material for analysis. . . .” (Saltmarsh 2011, 110).

Using a nonpolitical movie also mitigates problems related to historical inaccuracies and the film creators’ potential cultural and ideological biases (Kuzma and Haney 2001, 37; Mulligan and Habel forthcoming). This approach is not concerned with interpreting the meaning or potential truth of the movie’s narrative. Rather it concentrates on the relevance of politics to daily life and on establishing a shared set of character profiles that can be related to concepts throughout the semester. The primary focus is on helping students to impose the political *on* the movie rather than extracting it *from* the movie.

The short clips subtly contribute to discussion of important core concepts in the introductory class. The use of film is one of several pedagogical tools rather than the focal point of the course. Consequently students do not view it as a “movie class.”

Instructors typically show a complete movie and then examine its relation to political concepts. Some literature also finds merit in showing film clips rather than the whole movie (Paddock, Terranova, and Giles 2001; Waalkes 2003). I created a hybrid model that shows an entire film at the beginning of the semester and then a series of clip montages that are used in other sections of the course. This method has two advantages. First, some models of classroom film use structure their curriculum around a series of movies. This model is problematic because of the limited time and broad range of concepts covered in an introductory American government course. A hybrid model of film usage conserves time while still allowing frequent reference to the media content that students find interesting. Using short clips also avoids student passivity that often accompanies watching entire movies (Sunderland, Rothermel, and Lusk 2009, 543). Second, this method allows integration of a film into the existing curriculum as opposed to redesigning a new course around a series of movies. The short clips subtly contribute to discussion of important core concepts in the introductory class. The use of film is one of several pedagogical tools rather than the focal point of the course. Consequently students do not view it as a “movie class.”

INTEGRATION OF *THE BIG LEBOWSKI* INTO THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT CURRICULUM

The Coen Brothers’ film *The Big Lebowski* (1998) is loosely based on Raymond Chandler’s novel *The Big Sleep* (1939) (Nieland 2009,

77–89; Raczkowski 2009, 111–15). Set in Southern California during the early 1990s, the movie revolves around the exploits of a 1960s ex-hippie named Jeffrey “The Dude” Lebowski.² He is mistaken for a wealthy, aging paraplegic with the same name whose young wife Bunny is indebted to a pornography producer, Jackie Treehorn. To collect the debts, Jackie Treehorn sends two ruffians to collect from the wrong Lebowski, one of which urinates on Lebowski’s rug. The remainder of the movie focuses on Lebowski gaining restitution for the rug from the older Lebowski. Lebowski, with his Vietnam veteran bowling partner Walter Sobchak, is drawn into a series of false kidnapping plots related to Bunny. Lebowski becomes a sleuth looking for Bunny and becomes entangled with the elder Jeffrey Lebowski’s artist/feminist daughter Maude, a group of German nihilists, and the producer Jackie Treehorn. All this takes place within the backdrop of a bowling tournament featuring a team of Lebowski, Walter, and their hapless friend Donnie.

The movie appeals to college-age students and has been used successfully in classes in other disciplines (Gaughran 2009). Although lacking critical acclaim after its theatrical release, *The Big Lebowski* has achieved a cult-like status resulting in a traveling Lebowski Fest, scholarly conferences, and even the revival of The Dude’s beloved White Russian drink (Kurutz 2008). In-class uses of *The Big Lebowski* were conceptualized by merging the cultural appeal of the movie with a burgeoning scholarly literature examining the movie’s political underpinnings. Of particular use

were works focusing on its portrayal of war (Comer 2005; Martin-Jones 2009), ideology (Haglund 2008; Thompson 2009), and social criticism (Ashe 2009; Martin and Renegar 2007).

The following sections describe the integration of *The Big Lebowski* into the American government curriculum. The entire movie was shown and then its characters and events were revisited during the semester through a series of five- to ten-minute clip montages designed to spur discussion on First Amendment rights, voter identification, social capital, and foreign policy.

The Political in a Nonpolitical Life

A major cause of students’ disinterest in politics is its perceived irrelevance to their daily lives (Kiesa et al. 2007, 17). The learning objective of showing a nonpolitical movie like *The Big Lebowski* is to show that the activities of government and politics surround us although we are not conscious of their presence.

In the second week of class, prior to viewing the entire movie the students were given a worksheet with these directions:

Please describe every scene in *The Big Lebowski* where you see something related to politics, public policy, or the government. Explain how the scene relates to politics or government (*please include anything you think relates to politics and government!*).

The worksheet contained a table for students to enter a “Description of Scene” and a short description for “How Does the Scene Relate to Politics or Government?” As an incentive to attend class

when the movie was shown, completion of the assignment was a component of the class participation grade. Requiring students to record the political references has a corollary benefit of keeping them focused throughout the movie. Students averaged 11 political references from the film.³

After viewing the movie the class engaged in an open-ended discussion of political scenes or references. Students were encouraged to mention anything they listed, regardless of how tangential. They were asked to reference the scene and explain how it related to politics or government. Before moving on to other references, the class was asked to respond, thus providing other students the opportunity to elaborate or present an alternative explanation for the political nature of a scene. Responses fell into three categories. First, there were numerous political references in the backdrop of scenes. Examples are a clip in a supermarket with President George H.W. Bush on a television screen discussing the invasion of Kuwait, and other scenes with highly visible pictures of Nancy Reagan and Richard Nixon. Second, students focused on the backgrounds of characters such as Walter's status as a Vietnam War veteran, Smokey being a conscientious objector, and Jesus Quintana having served time in prison for child molestation. Finally, students offered examples of scenes that engaged in political discussions, many of which are analyzed in this article. After this discussion a PowerPoint presentation with

*his kidnapped wife Bunny. A dejected Lebowski, having been told that he will be held responsible for any further harm to Bunny, meets Sobchak in a coffee shop to commiserate. Sobchak gets irritated at Lebowski's concern for Bunny and during the course of the conversation shouts "forget about the f***ing toe!" The waitress asks him to keep his voice down because it is a "family restaurant" to which he replies "for your information, the Supreme Court has roundly rejected prior restraint." Lebowski claims that it is not a First Amendment issue and leaves an obstinate Sobchak at the counter.*

This clip sequences' learning objective is to understand what forms of speech receive constitutional protection. Walter Sobchak's confused interpretation of the First Amendment provides an opportunity to explore how the protection of political speech and freedom from censorship are fundamental Constitutional rights. To begin discussion students were asked whether prior restraint was really the issue in the scene. Because most students were unsure of the issue, the discussion provided the opportunity to differentiate between varieties of speech. The students discussed whether speech is unlimited and, if not, what circumstances might affect what can be said and where. Then discussion turned to the US Supreme Court's strict limitations on government regulation of political and symbolic speech as evidenced by cases involving burning the flag (*Texas v. Johnson* 1989), not saluting the flag (*West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* 1943),

Students were asked which party they believed the character would support based on the profile. Detailed partisan charts were then shown for each characteristic, from the most general to specific. Students were then asked to reevaluate the character's partisan affiliation.

18 references to politics and movie scene screen shots was shown. This reinforced the examples provided by students and highlighted some references that were not raised during the discussion.

The Use of Film Clips and Montages

Students had a common frame of reference and a set of familiar characters to draw on after watching *The Big Lebowski*. At four points during the semester clips were shown as a preface to a discussion of political concepts (see Appendix A for the sources of the clips).⁴ The clips addressed four topics that were already integrated into the American government curriculum: the First Amendment and free speech, partisan identification, foreign policy, and social capital. Each exercise's learning objectives were relevant to a specific course module. However, the clip sequences also tied into a comprehensive theme of understanding the importance of democratic politics. Thus, the voter identification sequence showed that different types of people have different political interests, while the social capital and First Amendment sections showed that it is necessary to understand and tolerate the views of others in a free society. Finally, the foreign policy section showed that elections have consequences depending on the ideology of candidates.

Clip Sequence 1: The First Amendment in Action: Political Speech, Obscenity, and Prior Restraint

The Scene: After a whirlwind of events Lebowski finds himself confronted by the elder Jeffrey Lebowski who shows him a toe allegedly taken from

wearing antiwar armbands in class (*Tinker v. Des Moines* 1969), and burning draft cards (*United States v. O'Brien* 1968). After discussing the content of Sobchak's outburst, the class concluded that it was not political speech. Students were then instructed that the Supreme Court has generally upheld regulation of speech on private property, therefore validating the waitress' request that Sobchak leave the coffee shop or lower his voice.

Sobchak's original accusation concerning prior restraint was then addressed. The concept of prior restraint was defined as government censorship before ideas are vocalized or printed. Students are then introduced to a discussion of the importance of the exchange of ideas in a free society even though some may be offensive or critical of the government. This discussion was framed in the context of *Near vs. Minnesota* (1931) that prevents prior restraint but allows for libel suits after the publication of printed material. Students were then shown that the Supreme Court has ruled it might allow prior restraint in cases concerning obscenity, national security, and speech that might incite violence.

Clip Sequence 2: Voter Identification and Microtargeting

The Scenes: 1) Lebowski explains his 1960s student activism and drug use to Brant. 2) Lebowski explains his role in the drafting of the Port Huron Statement and his inclusion in the Seattle Seven to Maude. 3) The two Jeffrey Lebowskis discuss the younger Lebowski's employment status. 4) Lebowski asks for legal representation by William Kunstler or Ron Kuby after being taken to the Malibu police station. 5) Lebowski and Maude discuss feminism.

The second set of clips focuses on voter partisan identification to show that an individual's demographic profile can be highly correlated with their partisan identification. Consequently, political consultants can use this information to create discrete issue campaigns to mobilize voters through microtargeting. This is reinforced by an exercise linking the demographic characteristics of Lebowski, Maude, and Walter Sobchak to their likely partisan affiliation.⁵ Between five and six characteristics of each person were listed in a PowerPoint presentation. Students were asked which party they believed the character would support based on the profile. Detailed partisan charts were then shown for each characteristic, from the most general to specific. Students were then asked to reevaluate the character's partisan affiliation.

Lebowski was identified as having the following traits: male, Caucasian, unemployed, former 1960s political activist, and a pacifist. On the basis of sex and race Lebowski would be more likely to vote Republican. However, after analyzing the voter identification of more specific characteristics the class determined that he would probably vote Democratic (or perhaps Green). Maude's profile left a bit less ambiguity: female, Caucasian, feminist, unmarried, nonreligious. The classes determined that Maude would most likely be a Democrat based on the strong partisan identifications for each of her traits. Republicans would be unlikely to target either Lebowski or Maude, while Democrats might use literature highlighting the environment to get Lebowski to vote and mailings concerning women's issues for Maude. Finally, Walter Sob-

out a handgun and threatens to shoot Smokey unless he marks it zero. Lebowski castigates Sobchak as they walk to the car for using violence against Smokey who was a pacifist and conscientious objector in Vietnam. Sobchak states that he once dabbled in pacifism, but that it was not a solution to dealing with world problems.

This sequence has two learning objectives: first, to discuss neoconservative foreign policy in the George W. Bush Administration and second, to show that elections between ideological candidates have consequences. Haglund's *Slate* article (2008) analyzing Walter Sobchak's foreign policy beliefs provided a framework for explaining neoconservatives and their influence on Bush administration policy. The assigned film clips portrayed Sobchak's concepts of conflict resolution and the use of military force. His self-image was defined by his military career, and his Manichean worldview created divisions between those who were supportive or opposed to his perception of the American way of life. The scene with Smokey displayed his rigid adherence to rules and his predisposition to use force when he perceived those rules had been broken. Further, it showed Sobchak's willingness to engage in unilateral action based on his gut instincts. He may have misperceived Smokey's foot as being over the foul line. However, instead of reaching a consensus among other players concerning the violation, Sobchak achieved his objective unilaterally through force. These traits mirror some of the major characteristics of either Bush or prominent neoconservatives who helped

In the experimental class, 91.8% of the students strongly or somewhat agreed that the movie made the class more interesting, and 95.1% said The Big Lebowski should be continued to be used in introductory American government courses. In addition, 80.3% agreed the movie made political science concepts easier to understand.

chak's profile showed that microtargeting can be problematic when an individual has a mix of disparate demographic traits: male, Caucasian, veteran, gun owner, divorced, Jewish. The first four characteristics would imply that he would be a Republican. However, in all of those categories, at least 35% of the population voted or self-identified as Democratic. The last two characteristics, being divorced and Jewish, lent themselves to voting Democratic. This mix made it difficult for students to come to a consensus concerning Sobchak's partisan identification. He was identified as a potential independent or swing voter. Sobchak would pose a challenge to each party. Republicans might target him with defense issues while Democrats might focus on the dangers of the culturally conservative agenda of the GOP given his Jewish background.

Clip Sequence 3: Foreign Policy and the Neoconservative Movement

The Scenes: 1) Lebowski watches George H. W. Bush utter "this aggression will not stand" on a television while in line at a grocery store. 2) Lebowski and Sobchak are discussing the damage to his rug while at the bowling alley. Sobchak calls it an act of "unchecked aggression" and claims that Lebowski must draw a "line in the sand" to prevent such behavior and to get back what is rightfully his. 3) Sobchak alleges that Smokey's foot was over the foul line on one roll during a bowling match. During an ensuing confrontation over how to mark the roll, Sobchak pulls

craft foreign policy during his administration. Consequently Sobchak's traits were used as simplistic caricatures to explain the Bush Doctrine. The focus on preemption, unilateral action, the belief in a binary division of the world into friends and foes, and dismissiveness of negotiation and nonviolent means of conflict resolution resulted in a discussion of foreign policy during the Bush era.⁶ It also led to a discussion of how policy cleavages can create stark contrasts between candidates resulting in choices like those posed in the 2004 presidential election.

Clip Sequence 4: Social Capital, False Consensus and Tolerance

The Scenes: 1) The opening credits pan across the bowling alley, showing action shots of men and women of multiple ethnicities, races, and socioeconomic status rolling. 2) Donnie announces that the team's next bowling league tournament match is on a Saturday. Sobchak becomes irate because he does not "roll" on Shabbos and demands that the match be rescheduled. Donnie does not understand this and Sobchak explains that to be shomer Shabbos means that you observe the Jewish Sabbath by not engaging in work, driving a car, handling money, or bowling.

This sequence's learning outcome is an understanding of policy cleavages in American society. Citizens should be cognizant of these differences and realize that the democratic process must account for numerous views. Discussion began by listing the wide

demographic range of people bowling in the opening credits of *The Big Lebowski*. Then, students were requested to think of the strange mix on the main character's bowling team: Lebowski the ex-hippie activist, the veteran Sobchak turned security consultant, and Donnie's unknown, but seemingly nonpolitical, background. It was posited that, if not for bowling, the three would most likely not spend time together socially.

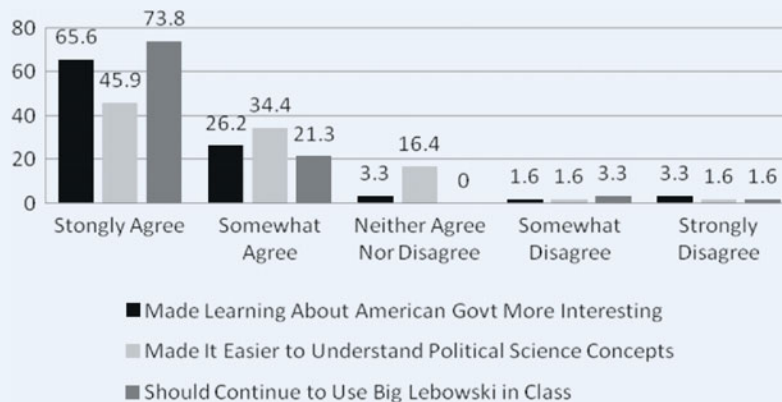
Putnam's social capital arguments from *Bowling Alone* were then introduced on a PowerPoint graph showing a steep decline in the number of people bowling in leagues while the total amount of people bowling has increased. This observation was related to the mix of people involved in the bowling leagues in *The Big Lebowski* and that while bowling these people were engaged in discussions that expose them to ideas and experiences they would not be privy to if they bowled alone. The accretion of social capital was shown to foster tolerance and understanding of people with divergent views. Then, students were introduced to a similar concept developed by Rosenthal et al. in *Republic on Trial*: false consensus. This concept is based on the fact that because most people associate with like-minded people, they also believe that the general public holds their opinions (2003, 47–67). Consequently, when government does something contrary to their beliefs people suspect that officials are heeding the wishes of special interests and not the public. Political conflict is perceived as resulting from outside forces exerting itself in the political process rather than from conflicting views of appropriate government policies by the citizenry. The class finished with a discussion of the consequences of the two concepts and the value to a democracy of individuals who associate with a broad range of people.

CLASS ASSESSMENT

The goals of this course were to increase students' knowledge base regarding politics, while increasing students' interest in the political system. The first goal was measured by a series of questions asking students to display their factual knowledge of class material. The participants in this research were students in four introductory American government sections during spring and fall semesters in 2010. Each section had approximately 33 students. One section was exposed to *The Big Lebowski* curriculum each semester, while the other served as a control group exposed to the same material without seeing the movie or subsequent clips used in the experimental class. Students had no prior knowledge of whether the movie would be shown in their section. Students who gave voluntary consent to participate in the study in the experimental and control classes were administered identical pretests at the beginning of the semester and the same posttest during the last week of class to assess their knowledge of the concepts discussed in this article.⁷ Both groups saw statistically significant increases in test scores between the pretest and posttest. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the increases in scores between the experimental and control groups. This result is not unexpected because the literature shows that students enrolled in courses that address government and policy end up with a greater knowledge of the political system and its processes (Ulbig 2009, 385–86).

Figure 1

Student Assessment of *The Big Lebowski* (in %)



The second goal, increasing interest in the political system, was designed to help inculcate a desire in students to pursue political knowledge in the future. The goal was to put students on the path to viewing politics as an activity that gives meaning to their life. Self Determination Theory (SDT) argues that people progress through three stages to accomplish this: (1) the amotivational stage where an individual does not engage in a specific activity; (2) an extrinsic stage where they engage in an activity instrumentally to achieve another goal; and (3) an intrinsic state in which they engage in an activity because of the inherent satisfaction it provides (Ryan and Deci 2000). Students are most likely to begin the path to intrinsic meaning when instructors provide a meaningful rationale for learning material (Niemic and Ryan 2009, 139). Professors can increase this type of engagement by making the curriculum relevant, interesting, and applicable to students' lives (Handelsman et al. 2005).

In addition to asking the factual questions, the posttest questionnaire administered to the experimental class included three questions using a five-point Likert scale and two open-ended questions to evaluate whether the use of *The Big Lebowski* helped students find politics more meaningful and interesting. The responses displayed in figure 1 show that the integration of *The Big Lebowski* into the curriculum was positively received by the students ($n = 61$). In the experimental class, 91.8% of the students strongly or somewhat agreed that the movie made the class more interesting, and 95.1% said *The Big Lebowski* should be continued to be used in introductory American government courses. In addition, 80.3% agreed the movie made political science concepts easier to understand.

Students' open-ended comments about using *The Big Lebowski* were overwhelmingly positive. Table 1 shows remarks that were representative of the class. Responses generally claimed that the movie and clips made the class more relevant, more interesting than a traditional class, and contributed to the students' understanding that politics and government are important to our daily lives. Of the students 72% mentioned one of Handelsman et al.'s characteristics encouraging engagement.

Some drawbacks to using the movie surfaced. Eight students found the movie hard to understand or difficult to relate to political concepts. In the future perhaps each class where the movie is being shown should be ended early to allow students who are

Table 1

Selected Representative Qualitative Comments from Students on What They Liked About Watching *The Big Lebowski*

Helped me to understand political concepts. Did this in a critical thinking kind of way, that made learning the concepts more interesting.
I like how it was a "current day" movie that I could relate to.
Real life examples make it easier to understand.
It really showed how we as American citizens, are extremely connected to our government, even though we may not always realize it, everyday we're surrounded by politics.
It helped me pick out things that coincided with politics, which I could never do before.
It was different than traditional learning. It made class a little bit more fun.
Gave great examples of topics w/out using the same old textbook/historical happenings. It really helped us to relate.
It made government a lot more tolerable.

having a difficult time understanding the plot to have further discussion with the professor. The ubiquitous profanity in the movie was mentioned by two students. Given some people's sensitivity to swearing, an alternative assignment could be given to students who feel uncomfortable while watching *The Big Lebowski*. The good news is that only two of the 61 students had nothing positive to say about the movie while 51 voiced no negative comments.

CONCLUSIONS

Faculty who teach introductory American government courses often struggle to reach students who find politics irrelevant to their daily lives. This article outlined one method of using a non-political movie to show the ubiquitous presence of politics in our daily lives and to create a set of common references that can be used throughout the semester. This method requires no prior political knowledge. Rather, interesting and humorous characters take on their own political meaning as they are yolked with political concepts over the course of the semester. Students in classes using this method showed increases in their knowledge of facts examined using *The Big Lebowski* clips although they showed no statistical difference from the control classes. Perhaps more importantly, the final assessment showed that students viewed the use of *The Big Lebowski* as helpful in making the material more relevant, interesting, and applicable to their lives. These are all traits associated with guiding individuals on a path to internalizing an intrinsic understanding of politics. In short, the use of *The Big Lebowski* generated interest in the class, made learning fun, and created memorable visual images, all of which are valid learning outcomes (Berk 2009, 2). Any successful attempt to engage students in an introductory American government class and increase their interest in politics is worth consideration.

The model of using a nonpolitical movie to engage students in politics is broadly applicable. Instructors are not bound to exploring the meaning of a movie by its director or writer. Rather, this method is limited only by the creativity of the instructor to relate important political concepts to the movie in a manner meaningful to students. Consequently, it is possible to expand on the examples used in this article. Other clips from *The Big Lebowski* could help foster discussions of philosophies and ideologies (nihilism, communism, fascism, Nazism), treatment of individuals in the criminal justice system, specific areas of public policy such as drugs and gun control, generational differences in politics using the

example of the effects of Vietnam on Baby Boomer politics, or an exploration of stereotypes (hippies, feminists, and veterans). Consequently, the movie could be easily integrated into a broad range of political science courses. Instructors could also find alternative movies or a series of clips highlighting the concepts discussed in this article if they did not like *The Big Lebowski*. For example, any diverse set of characters in close contact with each other could be used to explore partisan identification or social capital.

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NOTES

1. Only 24% of twelfth grade students are proficient in knowledge of civics and 12% in United States history.
2. The main character will hereafter be referred to as "Lebowski."
3. The methodology concerning the students in the experimental class is discussed later in the text. Fifty-three students were present for all classes watching the movie and they provided an average of 10.98 political or governmental references.
4. The introductory American government course is divided into five sections: Foundations of Government, Inputs into Government, Institutions of Government, Outputs of Government and a Wrap-up. The clip sequences were evenly divided in the course with the First Amendment clips in the Foundations section, the Voter Identification clips in the Inputs section, the Foreign Policy in the Outputs section, and the Social Capital clips in the Wrap-up.
5. There were a number of demographic characteristics that overlapped among the three characters. In an effort to expose the students to as many traits as possible, I concentrated on the differences between the characters when constructing the case studies. I used Gallup polls and *New York Times* exit polling data for top-line demographic characteristics such as sex and race. However, access to polling data became more problematic as I drilled down into the characters' profiles. I turned to the American National Election Studies to provide this more detailed data. In some cases I was able to find demographic questions which I paired with presidential votes to create a crosstab showing partisan votes (for example, the difference between gun owners versus nongun owners partisan preferences in the 2004 presidential election). In other cases I used feeling thermometers or policy position questions as proxies to determine the partisan identification of a certain trait. I then used this data to describe each of the three characters.
6. Further, Sobchak displays some of the neoconservatives' youthful associations with the Left when he admits to having "dabbled in pacifism" and can readily identify one of Lebowski's quotes as coming from V.I. Lenin.
7. The tests consisted of four closed-ended questions: three multiple choice questions on prior restraint, social capital and neoconservatism, and a voter

identification question asking students to check off which party they believed five different demographic groups would generally vote for. Students received a 20% credit each time they correctly paired a demographic group and political affiliation. In calculating scores, each of the four questions received equal weighting. There was valid pre and posttest data for 56 students in the experimental groups and 58 in the control groups.

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APPENDIX A: Clip Sequences “*Big Lebowski* and Political Science 101”

FIRST AMENDMENT CLIP

Chapter 12	52:30–54:15	Start with beginning of scene in the coffee shop. End with Sobchak saying “enjoying my coffee.”
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VOTER ID CLIP

Chapter 5	11:21–11:43	Start with Brant saying “You never went to college” and end with Lebowski looking in the mirror.
Chapter 18	1:27:56–1:29:10	Start with Maude saying “Tell me” and end with Lebowski coughing after saying “The occasional acid flash-back.”
Chapter 5	11:45–14:39	Start with “OK sir, you’re a Lebowski, I’m a Lebowski” and end with Mr. Lebowski yelling “the bums will always lose” through the door.
Chapter 17	1:24:04–1:25:45	Start with Lebowski being thrown into the office and end at end of scene when the cop says “out of my beach community.”
Chapter 11	42:21–44:54	Start with beginning of Chapter 11 and end with Lebowski saying “Oh no.”

BOWLING ALONE CLIP

Chapter 3	5:22–7:27	From beginning of scene until Donnie says “Whooohooo.”
Chapter 10	38:17–39:12	Start with Donnie saying “They posted the next round for the tournament” and end with Lebowski saying “I’m outta here.”

FOREIGN POLICY CLIP

Chapter 1	3:08–3:11	Short clip of President Bush talking about Saddam and aggression.
Chapter 4	8:04–8:35	Start with Lebowski saying “We all know who was at fault here” and end with Sobchak saying “Asian-American please.”
Chapter 6	17:13–19:44	Start with Sobchak saying “f’ing dog has f’ing papers,” end with Sobchak saying “Calmer than you are.”