

# The Profession

## Mainstreaming Political Science Instruction: An Additive Approach

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During the past three years on the editorial board of *PS: Political Science & Politics*, the last year as chair, I have had the opportunity to read many manuscripts and engage in numerous discussions about the character of our discipline, especially about the place of instruction/teaching in the academic life of political scientists. I have heard endless variations of the debate on the relative importance of teaching and research, wide-spread accusations that teaching has been ignored within our departments and discipline in our quest for scholarly status, complaints that the *American Political Science Review* lacks relevance for the vast majority of those who subscribe to it only because it comes with their APSA membership, and accusations that the annual meetings of the APSA and regional associations are closed, elitist gatherings of “producers” sharing arcane research findings with the minuscule like-minded audiences attending their panels.

Frankly, I find most of the debates and accusations about the state of the professoriate stale and unproductive. The complaints, as well-founded as they may sound to many political scientists, often seem to be more motivated by some felt need to “bash” the political science “establishment” than by a desire to create a different intellectual environment.

However, since joining the faculty of a newly established university—California State University San Marcos—I have been forced to rethink these issues in the larger context of a higher education institution defining itself. Interacting with a broad cross section of academics from many disciplines and institutions has underscored for me the widespread discontent and concern

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Before most of you tune out, let me assure you that this is not just another plea to elevate the importance of teaching (and therefore teaching institutions) vis-à-vis research. I believe that each department must weigh the relative importance of performance criteria within the context of its institutional mission. Rather, I want to suggest that there is an element of truth in the accusation of intellectual narrowness that can no longer be ignored. The lack of tolerance of diverse academic

missions and our extremely restrictive definition of scholarship is having a direct negative impact on fulfilling our personal and institutional academic missions.

The issue of narrowly defined scholarship was forcefully addressed in the Carnegie Foundation special report by Ernest L. Boyer on *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. But this excellent attempt to encourage a broadening of our definitions of scholarship to include “integrative,” “applied,” and “teaching” scholarship made few precise recommendations to correct the situation. Therefore, with specific reference to the issue of what I prefer to call “instructional scholarship,” I want to address this issue as it pertains to the discipline of political science.

I believe that as valid as many recent critiques of higher education have been, there has been little discernible movement toward a broader, more inclusive definition of scholarship because the proposed remedies require wholesale disciplinary change. Implicit in these calls for change is the message that academic luminaries of long standing are being told that their values and standards are no longer relevant. For better or worse, we must recognize that there is, in fact, a political science establishment that feels threatened by those who would question the recognition and reward system that is the foundation of our discipline, and their reaction is to reject demands for change. The justification given is that those who seek change merely wish to dilute scholarship and lower academic standards.

What distinguishes my recommendations is that rather than calling for changes that would make teaching

more valued and research less important in our academic lives, which is a “zero-sum” approach to change, I propose an additive approach that would “mainstream” instructional research in those ways that are *appropriate* and potentially productive. I describe the approach as “additive” exactly because it seeks to find ways to add to what we are already doing in the discipline, rather than to subtract or replace something. My judgment is that there must be *diversity* in our definition of “scholarship,” and in our reward and recognition systems. Specifically, instructional issues and instructional development should become legitimate topics for empirical research, and greater efforts should be made to integrate research into the instructional enterprise at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In short, the classic dichotomy between research and teaching can be partially bridged by “mainstreaming” instruction into our scholarly efforts in an additive way.

The issue here is not whether we should reward excellent teaching in introductory courses, for example, but whether we should encourage, through our traditional reward system, research into the most effective methods for teaching those introductory courses. If a faculty member proposed to do a carefully structured experimental study of the effectiveness of different techniques of instruction in American government sections, would any major research institution grant a sabbatical leave or reduce teaching loads in support of this effort? Would any professional meeting make room on its program for that “researcher” to report the findings? The simple truth is that as a profession we neither encourage nor reward instructional development, creativity, or experimentation.

I approach this issue with assumptions and observations, which should reassure my publishing colleagues. Others may not share my views, but they seem to me essential to any potentially meaningful dialogue. The primary merit of these observations and assumptions, as I see it, is that they should not generate the defensiveness that frequently arises among the “scholars” when told that they are ignoring the education of their

students, and among the “teachers” when they are made to feel like second-class citizens in their own profession because only research “counts.”

The assumptions are also realistic because the power to change things in the discipline is in the hands of the relatively few scholars, not the many who are teachers. If our approach to scholarship and instruction is going to change, the “elite” must not feel threatened by these changes. The additive approach takes nothing away from the value and role of research and publication, while it

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adds a new dimension that benefits a greater number. Let us, therefore, accept as given the following:

1. The “leading” cadre of U.S. political scientists, those listed in our regular recognition surveys (“top 10” lists), have been and will continue to be those who publish regularly in leading scholarly journals and academic presses.
2. The “leading” U.S. political science departments have been and will continue to be the academic homes of those in the “leading” cadre. In other words, we will measure departmental quality in terms of publication of traditional research.
3. None of the disciplinary ratings and rankings of faculty or institutions has anything to do with the quality of either undergraduate or graduate instruction delivered by those faculty and institutions.

4. The definition of scholarship is narrowly conceived as “basic” research. Applied research is accorded secondary status, and instructional research is in a distant third place. Consequently, research and instruction are not well-integrated and instructional scholarship is not well-developed.
5. By definition, faculty at “research” institutions teach less and teaching counts for less in their “evaluations” than faculty at predominantly “teaching” institutions, but undergraduate and graduate instruction is universally recognized as at least one of the responsibilities of every academic.
6. It is possible to teach and learn how to improve instruction through the use of empirically based research and techniques. That is to say, there is a science as well as an art to effective instruction.
7. It is the collective responsibility of the discipline to both advance knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge, i.e., to promote quality research and instruction.

My argument is that by broadening our definition of scholarship to include “instructional research” we could benefit everyone in the discipline at marginal cost and penalize no one. No one who is now a “publishing scholar” would have to change careers, and no one who is a “teacher” would have to give that up. But those who see a nexus between scholarship and instruction, who might wish to interact with others, and who might have something valuable to contribute to all of us would be given new, multiple opportunities to explore.

One response to my proposals is likely to be, “We already merged *The Political Science Teacher* into *PS*, which gives teaching topics more respect. We have the Course Syllabi project. We run instructional seminars before the APSA annual meetings. What more do you want?” My response is that the goal of the additive approach should be as much to “mainstream” instructional scholarship as it is to add more pages or marginal meetings devoted to “teaching.” Whether the status of *The Political Science Teacher* was en-

hanced or not by what was essentially a budgetary decision is debatable, but those who believe that we have done all we should in this area are badly mistaken.

The time has come for our discipline and its association to legitimize, and recognize as important, research on what the vast majority of us do most of the time. While the APSA annually congratulates itself on record attendance at the annual meeting, we rarely see data on how many members seldom, or never, attend. Nor do we find reports in *PS* on the number of political scientists in the United States who do not belong to the APSA. My rational choice explanation for the “no-shows” is that those who do not attend meetings or join the association see nothing in it for themselves as professionals. It is not their meeting or their association. The widespread view is that the American Political Science Association is, for all intents and purposes, the American Political Researcher’s Association, which, given the narrow definition of research, excludes the majority of its constituency.

While I believe that these changes justify themselves, I would also suggest that it is a virtual certainty that instructional issues will demand more attention in the coming decades whether we invite it or not. All of us are aware that there is a growing grassroots reaction to the direction that higher education has taken in the past three decades. Some of it is valid questioning of values and goals by well-respected academic voices sincerely interested in educational reform. But, unfortunately, much of the pressure for change is politically motivated populism, fueled by growing budget crises at the state and federal levels. Public and private institutions alike are increasingly being held accountable for the education they deliver, and shrinking dollars have created a real tension between the “laboratory” and the classroom among academics.

More and more highly paid university professors spending less and less time in the classroom and seemingly unconcerned about the quality of their teaching is being translated in the minds of many as a denial of educational opportunity. University

administrators, either willingly or under duress, are shifting priorities and budgets in the direction of instruction. The alternative to a proactive response to this problem is that change not to our liking will be imposed upon us by an impatient tax-paying public, dissatisfied alumni, students paying higher tuition for less education, and politicians looking for a scapegoat for all of society’s educational problems.

Even the most hard-shelled, self-interested academic researchers among us must realize by now that change is inevitable. If we in the academic world do not set the new course for this change, it will be set for us by those whose interests are not the same as ours. The demands for instructional quality will increase, and none will be immune from the pressure. It is, therefore, incumbent on the members of the discipline and their associations to take the lead in these reforms.

We have already seen positive signs of response in our discipline. *PS* published numerous articles on such topics as outcomes assessment, the meaning of liberal education in political science, and the promotion of critical thinking, *inter alia*. What I propose here are some simple but important steps that go beyond the pages of one journal to what we do as a discipline. Although each proposal stands alone, taken together the following eight suggestions could produce a major change in how we perceive ourselves, and more importantly, how we fulfill our obligations to society.

1. *A section on “Political Science Instruction” should be permanently added to the program of the annual meeting of the APSA and regional associations.* Panels under this section would be devoted to instructional scholarship, covering such topics as outcomes assessment techniques, research methodology instruction, “capstone courses” in the curriculum, and new pedagogical tools and techniques. This section should be accorded the same status and allocated the same time and space as any of the other sections.

2. *Each of the topical sections on the APSA annual meeting program and on regional meeting programs should include at least one panel on*

*instructional scholarship in its field.* These panels would be more narrowly focused on instructional innovations and developments in respective fields. For example, the Constitutional Law and Jurisprudence Section might include a panel on the “Pros and Cons of the Case Method Approach at the Undergraduate Level,” or the Political Behavior Section might have a panel on “Using Survey Research in Undergraduate Courses.”

3. *Each organized section of the APSA annual and regional meetings should attempt to include a panel composed of undergraduate students presenting their research.* This would encourage faculty around the nation to integrate research and instruction and encourage students to engage actively in research as part of learning. Political science departments should ensure that funds are available to support student travel to professional meetings for this purpose.

4. *The APSA should publish reviews of books and articles on instructional scholarship from all disciplines.* This could be done by adding a review section in *PS*. The reviews could be topical (e.g., works on outcomes assessment), and might be presented annually or semi-annually rather than quarterly, depending on interest and availability.

5. *The APSA should publish reviews of instructional materials (such as computer-based instructional packages, videos, and reference materials).* Additionally, articles on developments in library technology, especially computer-based searches available to students, ought to be published. This could be done through *PS*.

6. *The Course Syllabi project should continue to be expanded and put on-line for general access and input.* This would enable political scientists to share up-to-date information on instructional materials and organization.

7. *The APSA and regional associations should institute an annual award for instructional scholarship.* The recipient would be someone who has made a specific or career-long contribution to innovation in instruction.

8. *Political science departments should recognize instructional schol-*



arship as an important professional contribution worthy of full consideration in faculty evaluations. This is the most controversial and difficult recommendation to implement, but probably the most important because no matter what the APSA does, if this work is not rewarded at the departmental level, no one will engage in it. The integration of research and instruction by innovative faculty must be encouraged, and those who present and publish their "findings" and techniques should expect to have that scholarship recognized. Peer recognition of these contributions would enhance the reputations of institutions and faculty alike and provide "hard evidence" of a commitment to instruction, while at the same time satisfying the scholarly standards of the profession.

Realistically, I know that there must be some trade-offs in a finite system, but they need not be dramatic. For example, the proposal to add a section on instruction at the APSA annual meeting with panels is not without cost. The logistics of annual meeting planning would require cutting back panels in other areas to make room. However, at the 1991 meeting there were 40 sections and 468 panels on the official pro-

gram. If we were to add one section on instructional scholarship with 10 panels, that would represent a shift of about 2% of our attention toward an area that occupies at least 50% or more of the responsibility of most political scientists.

In conclusion, I find it remarkable that even in this era of "political correctness" the APSA and the discipline as a whole does not encourage scholarly diversity. We continue to insist that those who wish to be recognized for their scholarship adopt the classic Anglo-European tradition of scholarship limited to basic research in accepted areas. Not only do we exclude instructional and applied scholarship from the category of "real" research, we restrict multicultural diversity as well when we tell black, Latino, and women political scientists that their scholarship must be in the "mainstream" of the discipline, which means that they must conform to the standards of a specific, culture-bound conception of scholarship and higher education. Scholarly diversity requires the "mainstreaming" of different scholarship, not that different scholars all do a specific type of "mainstream" research.

The real obstacle to diversifying

scholarship is the collectively conservative mind-set of a discipline so insecure about its "scientific" credentials that it is afraid to admit any nontraditional definitions of scholarship that might undermine the academic status we have struggled so hard to achieve. Any change will require confidence and courage on the part of those who now have the power to define the discipline to include those presently excluded; thereby ending our disciplinary apartheid and recognizing instructional scholarship as a legitimate and valuable contribution of the professoriate.

### About the Author

Peter Zwick is Political Science Program Director and Coordinator of International Education Programs at California State University-San Marcos. As a professor at the first new U.S. public institution of higher education in a quarter-century, he has been devoting considerable attention to issues of academic values and scholarly diversity.

## From Professor of Political Science to Professor Emeritus

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On a previous occasion, I described what it was like to move from president to professor ("Notes of a President on Returning to the Faculty," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 11, 1988). That change is one that relatively few academics will personally experience. Now, three years later, I find myself in a position to describe a transition that all faculty (who survive) will ultimately undergo—formal retirement. (As for the final metamorphosis to late professor, I am prepared to wait indefinitely.)

To be sure, the transition to pro-

fessor emeritus is one we have all witnessed many times and to which most of us have probably given considerable thought, especially after we enter our sixties. As president, in fact, I had often both commented on and sought to modify (usually quite unsuccessfully) the folly of many university retirement practices. I use the term "practices" deliberately because much of what we do is simply the result of custom and inertia, rather than of thoughtful policy. Nonetheless, it is one thing to observe, reflect, and perhaps empathize; it is quite another when we ourselves are

personally and directly involved.

Nor is retirement a matter primarily of concern to the individual rather than to the institution. The experiences of those now retiring will surely influence the decisions made by many faculty when mandatory retirement is outlawed a year from now. These choices, I think it is safe to say, may become a matter of considerable significance to universities. This is a point to which I will subsequently return, for it involves a potentially important area of institutional policy, one where change may be long overdue.