

- Step 2: Make a problem situation out of the topic. Define the problem for students or allow students to define the problem themselves. Select a context your students will enjoy and find meaningful.
- Step 3: List pertinent and irrelevant information to be included. Get ideas from colleagues.
- Step 4: Include plentiful characters, who are doing things right or improperly. Bring them to life by giving them names, titles, responsibilities, attitudes, values, etc.
- Step 5: Develop fully the details surrounding events, problems, and personalities.
- Step 6: Generate questions to guide students' thinking about the problem(s) to reach the concepts/principles involved.
- Step 7: Review your case against the guidelines checklist (below) and revise.

Case Design Guidelines

Subject matter is realistic.
 Length is appropriate.
 Facts are presented sequentially, clearly, and briefly.
 Facts are adequate to resolve case.
 Characters are believable and interesting.

Known situations are not recognizable.
 Conflict or friction points are included.
 Irrelevant details are included.
 The problem is open-ended.
 The problem is likely to stimulate discussion/debate.
 Multiple solutions are possible.
 Solutions are not given or implied.

References

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Teaching International Politics: An Active Learning Model

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INTERNATIONAL EVENTS AND ISSUES, usually taking place thousands of miles away, are frequently perceived as having little direct impact on our daily lives. Foreign names and places, often "strange" and "obscure," further reinforces this perception of irrelevance. Hence, other than the most obvious effect that a major conflict in Mideast might have on the oil price, many people have difficulties identifying the specific impacts of the international politics on their daily lives and/or their communities. As a result of this "disconnection," the majority of the general public have developed an indifferent attitude toward foreign events, or a disinterest in global issues.

I believe that the perceived irrelevance and insignificance of international events and issues is definitely a major roadblock to effective learning of international politics, especially in retaining and applying the materials. However, the solution to this problem seems to go beyond the simple task of "keeping them informed." Even with the discussion of the concept of "interdependence" and ample examples of the U.S. relations with

the rest of the world, which supposedly prove the point of the domestic-international linkages, interests in international affairs might be enhanced only marginally. It seems that the real problem is greater than sheer ignorance or mis-perception; it might have something to do with the pedagogy: how information is delivered and presented by the instructor and how it is received and evaluated by the students.

To address this problem, I begin to look for ways to redesign my teaching plan and re-organize materials so that not only will the domestic-international connections be highlighted in a more explicit fashion, but also be more appreciated by students, so as to change their perceptions and attitudes, and remove their mental blocks.

International Politics: the Learning Process Revisited

In my own analysis, besides the mis-perceived domestic-international disconnection, the conventional way of teaching international politics might have contrib-

uted to the aforementioned indifferent attitudes. In the traditional approach, students learn about international politics through lectures; occasionally, video tapes or newspapers are used to integrate major issues and current events into classroom discussion. These methods, though widely used and probably effective in transmitting the knowledge, might not be the most effective ones in promoting student learning.

From my observation, one of the biggest problems in the traditional approach is that it creates a “theater-stage” mentality. Frequently, students learn about the global problems of wars, arms races, ethnic violence, or human rights violations through detached, aloof observation via books, videos, newspapers, and lectures. Hence, like the audience in a theater, they usually do not and can not sense the direct impacts of these problems on their lives and immediate surroundings. In other words, they have difficulty in relating to those phenomena. Thus, when all is said and done, global issues and events remain someone else’s problems and concerns.

To remove this obstacle, I try to use a different approach in teaching international politics. First, I retain a good part of the lectures, but re-organize its contents and reading assignments so that the international-domestic linkages are illustrated in a more distinct manner. Currently, most of the textbooks mention these “linkages” in their introductions, but disregard them afterwards. Hence, significant effort must be put in to select coherent lessons and cases that highlight the linkages whereas maintain their connection to the literature. More importantly, to supplement the lecturing and reading part, I try to integrate research assignments into the teaching process through the idea of *active learning*.

For me, “active learning” contains two essential elements. First, students should not be *idle spectators*. They cannot just sit there and wait for whatever is being presented by the instructor; instead they should take part in the “show” production. The whole class—the instructor and the students altogether—should be connected with one another in a joint exploration of the knowledge. Lectures, notes, and reading assignments prepared by the instructor provide the basic foundation for the learning process. Students should build upon that foundation by bringing additional thoughts and ideas to enrich that base. In this way, they will learn not only from the instructor, but also from one another. From this learning process, students will be able to further explore their potentials.

Second, to ensure that they fully extend their potentials, there must be enough interactions between the instructor and the students, and between the students themselves. Prompt feedbacks from the instructors and classmates will challenge the students to think through their logic, perfect their arguments, and do their best in anticipation of possible criticism from their peers. As a result, they must be critical of their own views and ar-

guments, as well as those of others. This might also facilitate the learning of critical thinking.

With these principles in mind, I start to experiment with an active learning model in teaching international politics. Through the metaphor of an “Early Warning System for Georgia” (EWSG), I try to make it more interesting, and more challenging, for students to understand and appreciate the connections between their local communities (the state of Georgia) and the international community. The assumption is that, once students discover themselves how the international society connects to their own local communities, they will be more interested in the subject of international politics.

Driving Home the Message: An Early Warning System for Georgia

The idea of early warning systems is to alert decision makers early enough to trends that might produce problems, so that they will have sufficient time to respond to the problems or to take preventive actions. While students will not, of course, be able to take the actions of such decision makers, the proposed EWSG model will adapt this idea to academic learning by emphasizing the processes of collecting data, interpreting data, and applying theory to potential problems.

In this approach, lectures in the class take the traditional direction by covering the substantive areas in international politics; it is up to the students to find out for themselves how Georgia might interact with the international community on various issues. Through research assignments, students will do research on different topics; but together, these topics fit nicely with each other like different pieces of a puzzle.

Phase 1. Division of Labor: The whole class is divided into two groups (Georgia specialist and global analyst) along three different issue areas. The role of a Georgia specialist is to study the current ties between Georgia and the international community within a particular issue area, whereas the role of a global analyst is to examine some of the global or regional trends and patterns in the same area.

Phase 2. Research: Examples of some research directions are suggested by the instructor, and students can select other topics with the approval of the instructor. Instructor should minimize overlaps in students’ research. A sample of the research topics is listed below:

Political, Security and Diplomacy Issues

Georgia Specialist

- Georgia’s defense industries and their foreign markets
- Georgia’s military bases, their roles in peace-keeping efforts and their roles in training foreign troops
- Foreign consulates in Georgia

- Georgia's foreign policy think tanks
- Georgia's connection with foreign terrorists, if any
- Georgia's connection with foreign drug trafficking, if any

Global Analyst

- Global/regional trends and patterns in defense spending
- Global/regional trends and patterns in arms transfers
- Trends and patterns in UN peacekeeping
- Ethnic conflicts around the world
- Religious disputes around the world
- Trends of democratization and political reforms
- Trends and patterns of terrorism
- Trends and patterns of drug trafficking

Economic Issues

Georgia Specialist

- Foreign investments in Georgia
- Foreign trade missions in Georgia
- Foreign trade missions sent by Georgia
- Foreign assistance programs and their impacts on Georgia
- Factories opened/closed due to international trade or investment
- Foreign tourism
- Foreign multi-national corporations in Georgia

Global Analyst

- Trends and patterns in global or regional trade
- Trends and patterns of economic integration
- Issues of trade disputes
- Trade-related controversies (child labor; prison labor)
- Trends and patterns of economic growth in various regions
- Trends and patterns of foreign aid (major donors, ranking)
- Current economic sanctions and their impacts

Social, Humanitarian, and Resources Issues

Georgia Specialist

- Cultural exchange programs between Georgia and foreign countries
- Immigrants and ethnic communities in Georgia
- Local humanitarian groups and their global connections
- Local health/environmental groups' global efforts
- Sister states or sister cities connections

Global Analyst

- Trends of population growth in the world
- Major demographic trends in the world
- Trends of human rights violations in the world
- Trends of global food production
- Health issues in the globe

- Education issues in the globe
- Environmental issues in the globe

Phase 3. Integration: Georgia Specialists and Global Analysts from the same issue area will have weekly discussion to share their research findings and speculate on how the global trends might affect the state of Georgia in the future, or how Georgia can position itself to benefit from the trends in the future. These weekly discussions are like brainstorm sessions. With their different specialty and knowledge, students will learn from each other and, collectively, they will examine the current implications of the global trends for Georgia and formulate hypotheses about the future.

Phase 4. Presentation: At the end of the class, each of the three issue group will present to the whole class the results of their discussions, findings, ideas, or speculations. At this point, the possibilities of cross-issues linkages are explored (for instance, the possible relationships between local immigrant communities and foreign investment, or the possible connections between foreign consulates and trade ties).

Assessment and Evaluation

Interestingly, students' responses to the project seem to vary at different stages. At the beginning, they generally show a lukewarm attitude, for they have no ideas about the specific global-local connections. However, once they are able to conduct interviews or compile information from local newspapers or through the internet, their interests start to pick up. Group discussions begin to make more sense to them. There is a genuine excitement and enthusiasm by the time when group presentation is about to start. They are quite interested in what other issue groups have found for their own communities. The question and answer hours that follow the presentation generally yield good discussion.

Feedbacks from students are quite positive for the project, and some give good suggestions regarding technical and logistic issues. Even though I have not used more rigorous techniques to evaluate the validity of the teaching model and its effects, it seems that the model looks quite promising for teaching international politics. It highlights the concept of the global village—how we are truly interdependent in this world—in a sensible and tangible way. In this format, the conventional theories and arguments are learned in an applied and observable context. Once they can make the connection themselves, students indeed appreciate the relevance and significance of the subject.

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