

A New Model for Graduate Student Pedagogy Training

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Abstract

This paper provides one model of Political Science Graduate Pedagogical Training that incorporates high impact practices, and ongoing formalized mentoring to provide pedagogical training for effective instruction in a political science classroom with a diverse student population. We provide detail on three central elements of this process: 1) pedagogical course work, 2) supervised teaching, and 3) advanced training and job market preparation. We expect that this model can be modified based on the context and conditions (e.g. resources, expertise, placement record) of other departments with graduate programs, and will work as an example for how HIP and other research-backed practices can be used to inform graduate pedagogical course design. Enhancing the teaching skills of political science PhDs will promote a legacy of excellent undergraduate instruction in political science departments across the United States and internationally, while also advancing the career skills of PhDs regardless of their career path choice.

Key Words: Graduate Pedagogy Training, Career Preparation in the Political Science Curriculum, Graduate Mentoring, High Impact Practices

Introduction

Learning pedagogical skills, developing a teaching philosophy, and gaining teaching experience while completing a Ph.D. is increasingly necessary for career success. The 2024 APSA Presidential Task Force Report called “Rethinking Political Science Education” identified pedagogical training for Ph.D. students as a key aspect of producing political science Ph.D.s that are prepared for a variety of job market opportunities:

Because most Ph.D.s will have teaching responsibilities at some point in their career, it is essential that Ph.D. programs be more engaged in providing support and expectations for students' development of pedagogical skills, including the capacity to foster civic engagement in undergraduates. (5, 2024)

To that end the report goes on to recommend that departments provide in-house training for Ph.D. students. This paper makes an argument for formalizing a pedagogical training sequence for Ph.D. students within Political Science departments. By providing an overview of and examples from our department's comprehensive training approach, we suggest options for implementing similarly effective programming in other departments.

1. Overview of GSU's Comprehensive Graduate Teacher Training Model

Graduate Students at Georgia State University most frequently teach our two entry level courses, Introduction to American Government and Global Issues. The American Government course (POLS 1101) provides a survey of the historical foundations and institutions of the United

States and the state of Georgia, an overview of political behavior in the U.S., and information about the current political environment at the national and state levels. It also includes a variety of civic engagement assignments, including activities that educate students on registering to vote and how to engage in civil political dialogue. Global Issues (POLS 2401) surveys comparative and international political concepts and phenomena, and is more writing intensive. Our pedagogical training is the same for all Ph.D. students regardless of their sub-fields of study or the course they will teach, and many of our Ph.D. students teach or serve as Teaching Assistants for both introductory courses at some point during the completion of their degrees.

Our department's pedagogical training and mentoring for Ph.D. students is continuous, starting from a student's first semester in the program. The instructional trajectory includes three main phases. First, Ph.D. students are required to take 3 hours of pedagogical coursework prior to teaching as the instructor of record for any class in our course catalog. This pedagogy coursework includes training in educational technologies, provides significant experiential learning, and exposes students to the textbooks and content of both core classes. Second, Ph.D. students teach as the instructor of record for one of the two introductory undergraduate courses, supervised closely by faculty in standardized "Master Courses." Graduate students first serve as an online asynchronous instructor and then teach a face-to-face class.¹ Third, graduate students are offered advanced training and job market preparation support. Students can teach additional entry level course sections, or sometimes upper level courses in their area of expertise such as Undergraduate Research Methods, Constitutional Law, or Comparative Politics. We also encourage advanced credentialing (e.g., in online and hybrid teaching), and provide teaching-

¹ While a few graduate students might begin as in-class Teaching Assistants for large faculty-taught courses (more than 200 students), the funding rules at Georgia State stipulate that most graduate instructors will instead begin their teaching careers as Instructors of Record in one of the core courses.

focused job market preparation support (e.g., teaching portfolio guidance, teaching philosophy feedback, and practice teaching presentations with faculty audiences).

These instructional training strategies have been designed and successfully tested in a highly diverse environment. Georgia State University (enrollment 52,000) is a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) in Atlanta where 83% of students identify as minorities.² GSU also enrolls students from over 150 countries. Our Political Science graduate student cohorts are equally diverse, and include high percentages of international students (50-87% over the past several years). Our graduate teacher training program levels the playing field for all of our graduate instructors regardless of their educational background, introduces them to our undergraduate student body, and specifically benefits our international students by familiarizing them with U.S. classroom norms before they serve as Instructors of Record. In addition, it assures that our diverse undergraduate students receive a consistently high level of instruction.

Below we provide more detail on each of our three instructional training segments, focusing on the American Government course within the training and mentorship process. These training strategies and instructional experiences have been decidedly valuable for our graduate students seeking both academic and nonacademic positions. We hope other institutions find inspiration and encouragement in the programming strategies we describe here.

² Georgia State University Fact Sheet. Accessed January 25, 2025. <https://commkit.gsu.edu/fact-sheet/>

2. Pedagogy Coursework

The required pedagogy course is the first step for preparing our Ph.D. students to teach at the college level. The pedagogical course has been taught “in-house” in the Political Science department since Summer semester 2010. Initially this course was taught in Summer semesters following Ph.D. students’ first year of completed coursework. Due to administrative and funding changes, however, the course was moved to the Spring semester starting in 2018. While this move had the benefit of confining required coursework to the fall and spring, it also meant our students experienced a challenging course overload during their first year.

As part of a comprehensive overhaul of our graduate teacher training, in Fall 2024 we began splitting the pedagogy course across two semesters. This change serves two purposes. One, it allows our Ph.D. students to have a better balance between research area course work and teaching course work, both of which are essential for student success. Two, it maximizes exposure to the course materials, course standards, student populations, and in-class dynamics that exist in the two entry level courses. Throughout the pedagogy course, furthermore, we employ active learning (e.g. think-pair-share) and High Impact Practices (HIPs) such as experiential learning, scaffolded portfolios, and group based peer reviews. Utilizing these pedagogical best practices maximize learning about teaching, and models their use for graduate students to duplicate once they are running their own courses. This can be particularly important for our international Ph.D. students, some of whom have not come from educational systems where active learning and experiential learning were expected.

The first semester of this course (1 credit hour) centers primarily on experiential learning. Students complete eight classroom observations of experienced faculty teaching our introductory

courses. Students prepare for their observations by reading the appropriate course content for the classes that they will attend. Therefore, if a student is observing an American Government class on Public Opinion, they read through the assigned textbook content and activities prior to class. Afterwards, students submit written reflection papers, and participate in two in-person debrief sessions with the full pedagogy class during the course of the semester. This process provides immersive exposure to manageable segments of the curriculum and allows Ph.D. students to identify varying teaching styles and classroom dynamics that exist at our large and diverse state university.

Additionally, students complete self-guided online modules covering topics like how to use our Learning Management System, Regular and Substantive Instruction (RSI) for online classes, providing effective feedback, and FERPA regulations. Georgia State University has an excellent Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Online Education (CETLOE). While the Political Science department provides discipline-specific pedagogical training, we have incorporated a wide range of materials from CETLOE into our teaching course. We encourage our students to complete specific “CETLOE Mini Courses” during the two semester pedagogy sequence³, and to continue attending other workshops after the course concludes. Through these online courses our Political Science Ph.D.s learn content specific information, best practices for instruction at colleges and universities, and how to present content in informative and engaging ways.

³ Mini Courses include lessons such as Regular Substantive Instruction (RSI) required for online instruction, Feedback Techniques for Effective and Efficient Responses, Constructing a Teaching Philosophy. These courses were created by Jennifer Hall, the Associate Director of Teaching Effectiveness at CETLOE GSU. Graduate Students who complete these courses earn a badge credential.

The second semester pedagogical course (2 credit hours) utilizes a more traditional graduate seminar structure. Taught by an experienced faculty member, the course is supplemented with guest Political Science faculty speakers who address topics such as teaching civic engagement and contentious political issues, backwards course design, technology for online and face-to-face instruction, discussion facilitation, and active learning in large sections (75 to 250 students). Additionally, the Master Course coordinators visit to discuss the curriculum and instructor expectations for the American Government and Global Issues courses.

Recent faculty who have taught this course have relied on *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* by Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) as a textbook for pedagogical tactics and best practices within a college and university context. Assigned chapters including “The Ethics of Teaching” (319-327), “Teaching Culturally Diverse Students” (150-171), and multiple chapters on active learning strategies provide an excellent starting place for building the requisite baseline knowledge for teaching in a college classroom. Additional readings and resources provide updated information and specific pedagogical tactics and perspectives relevant to the instructional practices within the Field of Political Science. *Connecting in the Online Classroom: Building Rapport between Teachers and Students* (Glazier 2021) provides an informative and practical guide about building communication practices or “rapport” for the online classroom to increase retention and student success. Glazier’s work also provides a clear example of how methodological skills relevant to the field of Political Science are transferable to the production of Scholarship of Teaching and

Learning (SoTL). Other resources include review and discussion of pedagogical tools such as Bloom's Taxonomy.⁴

Class time is a combination of lecture, discussion, group work, and peer review sessions. Students work on projects including the crafting of learning objectives (while learning about backward design⁵), creating PowerPoint or equivalent presentation materials and lecture notes for class sessions (one for each introductory course), collection of supplemental resources such as YouTube videos or data visualizations on a given course topic, drafting exam questions and study guide materials, and fashioning a teaching philosophy. Group work and peer review are used frequently to support the development of these project segments and promote a collaborative environment.

The semester culminates with submission of final instructional plans for two topics paired with two 20 minute teaching demonstrations. This semester-long project is scaffolded, meaning each segment of the larger instructional plan and presentation are submitted throughout the semester individually. Once submitted, drafts are peer reviewed and instructor feedback is provided. Students then revise and resubmit all segments of the project as a single portfolio. Based on this work, students create two practice teaching presentations on common topics (e.g., Understanding the Electoral College or Civil Liberties) that correspond to the portfolio they have produced. Additional departmental faculty are invited to these teaching demonstrations so students receive detailed feedback from the professor, the other students, and the visiting faculty members on their learning design, presentation materials, speaking style, and success covering selected content.

⁴ <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

⁵ <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/understanding-by-design/#template>

3. Supervised Teaching Experiences in Master Courses

The second phase of graduate teacher training at GSU encompasses closely supervised teaching experiences in our American Government and Global Issues Master Courses. In our department, a Master Course designation means that all sections of the class will use the same course schedule, the same textbook, the same assessments, and the same civic engagement assignments no matter which instructor is teaching the class. (It is thus similar to what some universities call “Multi-Section Courses.”) Each semester we offer Master Course classes in 3 modalities: asynchronous online, face-to-face, and simulcast (synchronous hybrid). Our standard courses (i.e., non-Honors classes) range in size from 75 to 250.

First time graduate student instructors of record are assigned to a 75-90 student asynchronous online section of the master course, and receive ongoing training from the Master Course Coordinators. New instructors use the class schedule, assessments, and a full syllabus template provided by the Course Coordinators. In the American Government track, the Coordinators also meet with the graduate instructors every week for additional mentoring and training. The Coordinators guide graduate instructors on setting up the course technologies for their class (e.g., the LMS and the Top Hat platform), correctly assigning textbook chapters and related activities (e.g., current events assignments), posting succinct and timely announcements, providing productive RSI (regular and substantive instruction) through short videos, responding effectively to student emails, and submitting roll verifications, grades, and other university required items in a timely manner. First-time instructors are thus heavily mentored and carefully shepherded through their first semester by the Course Coordinators while learning the intricacies of teaching a college level course. This process ensures that graduate students are supported

through their first teaching experience and ensures consistently high quality course content, communication, and instruction for undergraduate students.

After successfully teaching an asynchronous course, graduate student instructors are then assigned to teach a face-to-face course with full responsibility for their live class sessions.⁶ While these returning instructors also use the American Government master course syllabus, assessments, and schedule, they have full autonomy over lectures and in-class activities. Face-to-face instructors continue to attend the weekly mentoring meetings, where the Course Coordinators and other faculty POLS 1101 Instructors share ideas and resources for teaching the content of the week. Graduate students teaching face-to-face also gain experience discussing civic engagement activities with students. In addition to the interactive textbook materials, we include modules on how to register to vote, how to engage in civil political dialogue, how to contact one's representatives, and so on. Graduate instructors are fully engaged in our discussions about the importance of teaching civic engagement, and our efforts to constantly update and refine our activities.

Face-to-face instructors are also formally observed by a faculty member at least once per semester. Initially, graduate instructors are observed by the core Course Coordinators who provide both written and verbal feedback during a post-observation consultation. Once graduate student instructors have a Ph.D. committee in place, however, they ask their Ph.D. chair or another member of their committee to observe their teaching at least once per year. This formalized observation schedule allows for continued feedback on instructional techniques and

⁶ While departmental needs can temporarily override this planned sequence of teaching assignments, our department is united in believing all graduate students should gain both online and face-to-face teaching experience.

provides faculty first hand evidence of the candidate's teaching credentials to draw on when writing letters of recommendation.

These intensively supervised teaching opportunities and sustained mentoring activities produce experienced graduate instructors who are also pedagogically thoughtful and savvy. As a result, our undergraduate students enjoy high quality teaching even by first- and second-time instructors, and our graduate instructors are primed to teach successfully as new faculty once they successfully navigate the job market.

4. Advanced Training and Job Market Preparation

In the third phase of our graduate teacher training, we strongly encourage graduate students to seek advanced pedagogical training and credentials, and to secure additional teaching experience, including advanced political science courses when possible. We also support their preparation of teaching portfolios and polished teaching demonstrations for the job market. All of these activities are essential for Ph.D. placement successes. Prior pedagogical training and teaching experience means new tenure track faculty are not reliant upon “on the job” training to fulfil their teaching requirements and can more easily balance research and teaching demands. Moreover, the most recent APSA eJobs report (from 2021-22) showed that less than a quarter of U.S. academic job placements are tenure track,⁷ and *more than half* (53%)⁸ were non-tenure

⁷ According to the “APSA Graduate Placement Report: Analysis of Political Science Placements for 2021-2022” 23.4% of placements were tenure track, 22.1% were post-docs, 17.8% were full time or part time academic non-tenure track, and 17.5 were administrative or non-academic (p.12).

⁸ The “2021-2022 APSA eJobs Report: the political science job market” indicates an overall decline in US domestic academic jobs, of those posted more than half (53.12%) were for non-tenure track jobs (p.9). Internationally, tenure track job postings were greater than non-tenure positions.

track jobs. The report also noted a need for Ph.D.s to expand their “transferable skills.” Teaching requires administrative skills, communication skills, and the ability to present complex concepts in an easily understandable and confident manner. These are transferable skills that undoubtedly are assets to Ph.D. students whether they are securing and maintaining academic appointments or finding private sector opportunities.

To this end, we urge our graduate instructors to be strategic in acquiring additional teaching credentials. For example, we strongly encourage all advanced students to complete GSU’s 4 week “Mastering Online Teaching” (MOT) course. Offered by our Center for Teaching, Learning, and Online Education (CETLOE),⁹ this course teaches students the fundamentals of online course design and delivery in about 15 hours. Students can also complete additional short courses from CETLOE (discussed above). And a few advanced students each year are able to gain expertise as simulcast (synchronous hybrid) teaching assistants.

Once graduate instructors have successfully taught both asynchronously and face-to-face, they are encouraged to teach additional sections of our core classes, and occasionally are invited to teach upper-level Political Science courses in their areas of research expertise (e.g., Public Law, Comparative Politics, or Undergraduate Research Methods are the most common). Their successful teaching experiences at GSU can also translate into teaching opportunities at other regional institutions (e.g., the University of North Georgia, Georgia Military College), most of whom also need part-time instructors who are well prepared to teach Intro to American Government or Global Issues. These additional courses solidify their teaching expertise, and

⁹ <https://cetloe.gsu.edu/teaching-advancement/mastering-online-teaching-series/>

serve as a funding source while completing dissertations and entering the job market post graduation.

Finally, we assist all advanced Ph.D. students with teaching-centered job preparation. By providing iterated feedback on tailored teaching philosophies, sample syllabi, full teaching portfolios, and other required teaching materials, we assist graduate students with putting their best foot forward in every job application. Perhaps most importantly, however, we promote practice teaching presentations held before a faculty audience prior to every on-campus interview our students receive. Since teaching demonstration expectations can vary so widely from one institution to another, live practice sessions with constructive feedback is essential for graduate students seeking positions that will require teaching whether in academia or out.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Our revamped graduate teacher training program is still in its early stages, but the basic elements of our training sequence (including pedagogy coursework, supervised teaching within master courses, and job market preparation support) have been in place for at least 5 and sometimes as long as 15 years. We are currently seeking additional data on the effects of these interventions across time, but our current Graduate Program Director recently commented that “Many of our PhD students who get academic jobs do so in large part due to their teaching experience and training.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Private communication to authors, December 2024.

We hope that other Ph.D. programs might usefully replicate aspects of our graduate teacher training sequence to create their own “in-house” training programs, even as we fully appreciate that every department and university will have different policies, needs, resources, and challenges. Georgia State’s Political Science faculty, for instance, includes 10 full time teaching-track faculty members, 3 of whom are assigned to serve as Master Course Coordinators. Because our large undergraduate student body is required to take at least one political science class, our graduate students also end up with lots of teaching opportunities, both online and face-to-face. One of our significant challenges, however, is that our average course sizes are quite large, making it difficult to train graduate instructors in pedagogical techniques appropriate to seminars and other small format classes. Recognizing that every department will face unique challenges, we propose that Political Science faculty consider the following options for experimenting with and developing what we have identified as three core elements of graduate teacher training: 1) pedagogical course work, 2) supervised teaching, and 3) advanced training and job market preparation.

Creating an in-house pedagogy course might be the easiest of our three recommended core elements to put in place. As described above, we have utilized resources from our teaching and learning center to build resources for pedagogical training and development for graduate students, and we encourage faculty at other institutions to similarly work with their teaching and learning centers when available. While building in-house training specific to the teaching of Political Science courses with a focus on civic engagement knowledge and skills is paramount, Teaching and Learning Centers on campus can support this process by providing foundational resources on instructional best practices, teaching technologies, and so on. Once these resources are developed in the context of Political Science instruction, they can also also support Part Time

or incoming Full Time Faculty in the development of course materials and pedagogical enrichment.

Departments may also be able to leverage relationships with allied departments in developing pedagogy courses. Cross-listed courses between Political Science and e.g., Sociology or other social science departments might not be perfect solutions, but they might provide ways for departments to maximize available resources and instructor time for these graduate level training courses. Additionally we encourage departments to incorporate structured teaching observations within those pedagogical courses to expose graduate students to a range of teaching styles and undergraduate classroom dynamics.

Supervised teaching experiences, the second element of our proposal, will require more development and resource investments. Creation of standard course material for courses commonly taught by graduate students provides a pathway for large scale systematic graduate teaching supervision. In smaller departments or departments without large numbers of introductory course sections taught by graduate students, this model of supervision can be easily modified. Key aspects of supervised teaching include regular check-ins with first time instructors, opportunities to discuss and share resources and ideas for teaching particular topics, guidance for the administrative side of teaching (roll verification, entering grades, effective use of teaching technologies), support for student concerns or grade disputes that may arise during a semester, and faculty observations of first time teachers with directed feedback. Factors to consider when establishing supervised teaching will include the level of support of administrators and faculty, and the availability of faculty to provide the oversight and organization. Course releases or reduced teaching loads for faculty who step into these

supervisory roles should be considered by departments, particularly if one or two faculty are overseeing a large number of graduate instructors.

Lastly, job market preparation support will require faculty investment. Assessing what institutional supports already exist and determining if there are ways that this support can be formalized or integrated more fully into the department culture can be a valuable first step. If departments already support job market preparedness, furthermore, it can be useful to examine if resources and support are focused equitably on Ph.D. students who are submitting applications for teaching positions, research positions, and non-academic postings.

Through this paper we have presented the most recent iteration of our graduate pedagogy training and mentoring process. We hope that this information provides practical insights for other Political Science Departments who seek to better support Ph.D. student's training and instructional experiences prior to entering the job market.

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