

# All the Feels: Developing Empathy in Political Science Courses

Chelsea Kaufman, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Department of History and Political Science  
Wingate University

Colin Brown, PhD  
Associate Teaching Professor  
Department of Political Science  
Northeastern University

**Abstract:** In recent years, the discipline of political science has expressed interest in the concept of empathy and its role in politics. Some scholars argue that empathy is necessary to cultivate in a democratic society as it helps us to understand and identify with others; others argue that this is not necessary, or is even counterproductive to this goal, due to the negative aspects of empathy. This leads to the question of whether empathy can - or should - be cultivated in our political science classrooms? To begin to answer this question, one of the authors conducted a pilot study in an introductory course in Fall 2023, followed by subsequent studies in general education courses during Summer and Fall 2024, in order to gauge students' levels of global empathy and determine whether it was being successfully taught, or if we were inadvertently teaching the "dark sides" of empathy. Evidence from a survey of the students and review of their assignments demonstrates some evidence that their global empathy grew as a result of the course. As a result, we plan to continue to conduct the study in subsequent semesters as well as in other institutional settings in order to determine if this conclusion is broadly applicable in the discipline of political science.

Prepared for presentation at the Teaching and Learning Conference of the American Political Science Association, February 7 - 9, 2025, Alexandria, VA

# Introduction

Empathy is a concept used in at least four different ways in the discipline of political science. These include to understand political positions from other perspectives; to be able to identify with other members of one's own group, and also to understand or even appreciate commonalities with identified out-group members; to engage in democratic deliberation; and to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion (Brown and Kaufman 2023). A review of the broader literature on the concept of empathy, however, suggests that teaching empathy may be detrimental, or even counterproductive, to achieving those goals under certain circumstances. Several scholars have found that empathy may actually fuel ideological or racial divisions or lead us to believe that we understand others and are helping them, when instead we are speaking for them or victimizing them to support our own moral superiority (Bandes 1996; Bloom, 2016; Breithaupt, 2019; Krause 2011; Simas, Clifford, and Kirkland, 2019; van Boven, and Lowenstein 2005).

In this study, we set out to examine whether empathy was being successfully taught in general education courses in an effective manner, without inadvertently teaching students the “dark side” of empathy rather than achieving the previously stated goals. We first conducted a pilot, in order to evaluate the initial results, before launching into what we hope will become a broader study of cultivating empathy in political sciences classrooms across multiple universities. We then collected two additional semesters of data from the initial university after making enhancements to the study based on the initial findings from the pilot. In the pilot and subsequent semesters, we found that students recognized the importance of understanding the experiences of others, but also realized their own shortcomings in being able to relate to their circumstances. Furthermore, although students expressed some willingness to take action on others' behalf, their general level of political engagement did not suggest that such action was likely. There was some limited evidence of “filtered empathy” - a need to see others as victims - which we will have to approach with caution in the future if we continue to pursue the goals of cultivating empathy in our political science classrooms.

# Teaching Empathy?

For the 2023 Teaching and Learning conference of the American Political Science Association, a co-author and I reviewed the ways in which the concept of empathy is employed in political science (Brown and Kaufman 2023). In recent years, the concept has received increased attention, such as Sirin, Valentino and Villalobos' (2021) book on the topic winning Best Book Award from two organized sections of APSA in 2022. We initially set out to answer the question of how to effectively teach empathy in the classroom. We quickly realized, however, that this concept has been used in a multitude of ways across various academic disciplines (Batson 2009; Deutsch and Madle 1975). Before understanding how to effectively teach the concept, we needed to understand exactly what educators across the discipline might be trying to teach. Our review identified four common themes regarding the use of empathy across the discipline of political science specifically:

1. To understand political positions from other perspectives (Caughell 2018; Crocco et al. 2018; McCartney 2020);
2. To be able to identify with other members of one's own group, and also to understand or even appreciate commonalities with identified out-group members (Cialdini et al 1997; Decety et al 2012; Decety and Cowell 2014; Unger & Thumuluri 1997; Sirin, Valentino and Lobos 2021);
3. To engage in democratic deliberation (Goodin 2003; Krause 2011);
4. To foster diversity, equity, and inclusion (Givens 2022; Monroe and Martinez-Marti 2008).

Furthermore, there is a debate about whether promotion of empathy is actually good for society or not. A few scholars argue that empathy not only achieves the goals listed above, but is in fact essential to a functioning democracy (Caughell 2018; Krause 2011; McCartney 2020; Morrell 2010). Others, however, argue that empathy may not lead to increased political tolerance or democratic deliberation, but may instead be counter to achieving these goals. Breithaupt (2019) and Simas, Clifford, and Kirkland (2019) argue that empathy can fuel divisions in society rather than helping us to understand the other side. For example, if one learns to consider the other side of the issue, one might instead learn that the issue has "sides" and begin to identify with one. There are also a few scholars that find empathy is associated specifically with having a liberal political ideology, which could lead to growing divisions when cultivated (Bloom 2016; Hasson et al. 2018; Morris 2018, 2020; Sirin, Valentino and Villalobos 2021).

Scudder (2020) argues that communication is far more important than empathy in democratic deliberation. Her concern is that empathy alone is insufficient when our differences are so vast that it becomes difficult to imagine the perspective of the other side.

There are some who have concerns with the use of empathy in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. Even those who see positive aspects of empathy in terms of its necessity to democracy note that it can reinforce existing inequalities when used to identify with powerful groups in society rather than marginalized ones (Bandes 1996; Krause 2011). Another issue that may arise is that when we are learning about marginalized groups, we may identify more with the “helpers” than with the people who are suffering. Breithaupt 2019 refers to this concept as “filtered empathy.” Instead of working towards advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion, we may see people as victims, expect certain roles or behaviors from them, and fail to listen to them or allow them to speak for themselves (Breithaupt 2019; Scudder 2020). Furthermore, there is also evidence of an “empathy gap,” such that people do not actually do very well at estimating others’ perspectives (van Boven and Lowenstein 2005). Instead of understanding how others would feel in their own circumstances, people typically understand how they themselves would feel in those circumstances. As a result, one might not only try to speak for others instead of listening to them and helping them to speak for themselves, but also do so inaccurately.

Given this debate, one might ask whether political science educators *should* attempt to teach empathy in our classrooms. Bloom (2016) argues against the concept in general, implying that it should not be taught; Prinz (2011) does not argue that it is harmful, but instead that we should work towards the specific goals we would like to achieve, rather than trying to do so indirectly through cultivation of empathy. However, one must keep in mind that there are numerous other voices who argue that empathy is necessary for democracy. If that is the case, is it not our responsibility as civic educators to teach it? As educators, we may also want to ensure that we are teaching empathy in a way that leads to the aforementioned positive outcomes, and not its “dark sides,” as Breithaupt (2019) would say. Without teaching this concept intentionally, how would we avoid the numerous potential problems? In short, political science educators need to at least be cognizant of empathy’s role in their classroom, lest they fail to teach a concept that is crucial for our democracy or inadvertently teach it in such a way that they undermine democratic deliberation, political tolerance, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This conclusion finally leads us to the initial question: if one does want to teach empathy in their classroom, how would they go about doing this in an effective manner? First, keep in mind that one must consider what sort of empathy they are trying to teach among the various uses employed across social scientific disciplines. Then, one can attempt to create a rubric or similar measure in order to monitor their effectiveness in teaching it (Bennion 2017). We found that pedagogical approaches that allowed students to put themselves in others' shoes (for example, through experiential learning or simulations), or at least witness and reflect the experiences of others who may differ from their own are most effective (Aguilar et al. 2022; Bachen, Hernandez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012; Caughell 2018; Crigler et al. 2017; Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos 2021; Suarez 2017). It may also help to further bridge the "empathy gap" if we not only put students in others' shoes, but also ask them to imagine themselves in scenarios where they think they would have felt the same thing that the other person was feeling (Cohen 2022, pg. 204).

## Data and Methods

### Pilot Study

The data for the pilot study portion of this analysis come from student surveys and reflection paper assignments completed during an Introduction to Racial and Ethnic Studies course that I taught in the Fall semester of 2023.<sup>1</sup> The course is an interdisciplinary course that fulfills social and behavioral science elective credit and is a requirement for students enrolled in the university's racial and ethnic studies minor. Although the course is interdisciplinary (and was developed by faculty representing many departments), it has in all instances been taught by faculty from the Department of History and Political Science. Faculty have some latitude in how they teach it, but it includes several common fundamental topics (such as social construction of racial and ethnic identities, intersectionality, definitions of discrimination, racism, and prejudice, etc.). Students in this particular iteration of the course had multiple assignments that would allow them to consider others' perspectives, such as in-class discussion prompts that allowed them to engage with content recently covered in class; short reflection papers on topics related to the course

---

<sup>1</sup> This study was approved by the Wingate University Research Review Board on 8/31/23, Protocol #CK083123

content; and a final project that required them to create an infographic to teach their classmates about one of those topics.

The survey questionnaire and reflection paper assignment prompts were developed based on Raymond, Zappile, and Beers' (2016) study of global empathy and political and civic engagement in their classrooms (refer to results and appendix for exact question wording and prompt instructions). These questions were chosen because they capture elements of several of the uses of empathy previously noted and were relevant to the course content, which was global in nature. There were 13 students enrolled in the course, and two reflection papers were analyzed for each of these students (if they completed both assignments). Of these 13 enrolled, 6 students completed the survey for .5% extra credit. The course was primarily first-year students (8 of the 13), and all students who took the survey were between the ages of 18 and 22. Of those who had completed the survey, there were 5 men and 1 woman, and half of them had traveled outside of the United States before. While the sample is very small, this was intended to be a pilot study before conducting a larger study across multiple class sections at multiple universities.

Global empathy was measured at multiple points throughout the semester, with reflection papers assigned during weeks 6 and 10 and the survey occurring near the end of the semester. In order to measure global empathy in the reflection papers, students were instructed to consider at least 3 questions concerning this topic in their essays. We (the author and the student research assistant) then independently reviewed these essays to identify common themes as well as demonstrative quotes that supported each of these themes. We also reviewed the student responses to the global empathy scale and the political engagement scale in the survey in order to see how many of them agreed (somewhat - strongly) with the statements or how often they engaged in various political and civic activities. Our goal was to find at least some evidence that students learned to identify with others in out groups; understood others' political perspectives; and supported diversity, equity, and inclusion, but at the same time did not see those others as victims or as so far removed from the students' own experiences that divisions between them became wider.

## Subsequent Surveys

As a result of feedback received on the pilot study at the North Carolina Political Science Association Annual Meeting in 2024, the survey was revised for future distribution. The key changes to the survey were to add scales intended to measure perspective taking, individual empathy, and empathetic concern generally. These were adapted from Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos (2021)<sup>2</sup>. We also added additional demographic questions as well as additional questions as to where students were receiving political news and information (i.e. word of mouth, television, specific social media networks, etc.). The goals were to further contextualize who these students were, where else they might be receiving political news and information from outside the classroom, and to gauge their level of empathy in general, rather than only focusing on global empathy.

The survey was distributed in two subsequent general education classes offered by the Political Science department: Introduction to Comparative Politics and Global Issues in Race, Ethnicity, and Gender. These fulfill either the social and behavioral science general elective or the university's general education requirement for students to take four 3-credit courses with a "global perspective." Political science majors are also required to take both courses, although in neither case were these courses predominantly populated with majors. The Introduction to Comparative Politics course was offered as a 4-week course in summer 2024 to incoming first-year students in the university's summer bridge program<sup>3</sup> and the Global Issues in Race, Ethnicity, and Gender course was offered as an Honors College seminar during the Fall 2024 semester (most, but not all, students were enrolled in the Honors College). In each case, the surveys were conducted near the end of the semester and the students were once again offered .5% credit for participation. Due to the short length of the comparative politics course and the nature of the assignments for the Honors College course seminar, the mid-semester reflection papers were not assigned to gauge global empathy at multiple points in time.

Table 1 shows the respondent demographics for these subsequent surveys. During the summer program, 8 of the 16 students enrolled completed the survey, and during the fall semester, 10 out of the 15 students enrolled completed it. Each class represented a variety of majors due to these being general

---

<sup>2</sup> They adapted them from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis 1980).

<sup>3</sup> The author is also the Director of the Building and Supporting Excellence (BASE) Program. More information can be found at: <https://www.wingate.edu/academics/student-support/base-program>

education courses, and across the two courses, all class levels were represented. Most of the students who completed the surveys were women, and the racial and ethnic makeup of the courses was diverse, in line with the typical demographics of Wingate. A significant number of students in the Honors seminar were also international students, which may have influenced their views on global issues. Interestingly, although across the two courses there were Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, as well as moderates and independents, none of the students described their own political viewpoint as conservative. In fact, it was quite common for students on the political identity questions to answer with “not sure” or leave the question blank. This response was more common among the first-year students during the summer program.

**Table 1: Respondent demographics**

	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
<b>Class standing</b>		
First year student	100.00%	0.00%
Sophomore	0.00%	50.00%
Junior	0.00%	10.00%
Senior	0.00%	30.00%
<b>Gender, race, and ethnicity</b>		
Female	75.00%	60.00%
Male	25.00%	40.00%
Black or African American	87.50%	20.00%
White	25.00%	50.00%
American Indian or Alaska Native	12.50%	0.00%
Hispanic or Latino	12.50%	40.00%
Asian	0.00%	10.00%
<b>Geographic background</b>		
Suburban	50.00%	60.00%
Urban	37.50%	40.00%
Rural	12.50%	0.00%
Has traveled outside of the United States	25.00%	70.00%
<b>Political identity</b>		
Identifies as a Republican	0.00%	10.00%
Identifies as an Independent	25.00%	40.00%
Identifies as a Democrat	0.00%	20.00%
Not sure of political identity	62.50%	20.00%
Describes their political viewpoint as conservative	0.00%	0.00%
Describes their political viewpoint as liberal	14.29%	40.00%
Describes their political viewpoint as moderate	0.00%	20.00%
Not sure of political viewpoint	62.50%	20.00%



# Results

## Survey

As previously mentioned, students in all three courses completed a survey on political interest and engagement and global empathy near the end of the course. Across the 3 courses, a total of 24 surveys were completed, with 18 of those being the revised survey after the completion of the pilot study. Overall, the results suggested that students had a high level of interest in political engagement, but were not necessarily likely to take action on the basis of those interests. Furthermore, while they demonstrated high levels of awareness about others' perspectives and acknowledged the importance of empathy, they were less likely to say that they would take action themselves or that they felt it was their own responsibility to take such actions to address problems that others may face around the world.

**Table 2: Interest in Political Engagement**

	% Agree		
	Fall 2023	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
I think it is important to understand history, politics and contemporary social issues	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
I am interested in political issues	83.33%	66.67%	60.00%
I would be willing to give up some free time to work for a political or social cause	83.33%	55.56%	50.00%

In Table 2 we are able to see the students' levels of political interest. Most were interested in political issues generally and were willing to volunteer their time to work on a political or social cause, although willingness to give up their time was less common. All of the students that completed the survey agreed that analyzing and understanding history, politics, and social issues are important. These results do not provide direct evidence of empathetic attitudes, but do demonstrate the importance of at least being aware of political issues and engaging politically.

**Table 3: Choice of News Medium**

	% Used	
	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
Social media	77.78%	100.00%

Friends/word of mouth	55.56%	50.00%
Television	44.44%	20.00%
Radio or podcast	33.33%	20.00%
Newspaper (online or print)	22.22%	10.00%
Other news websites	22.22%	60.00%

**Table 4: Usage of Social Media Platforms**

	% Used	
	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
X (Twitter)	83.33%	40.00%
TikTok	83.33%	70.00%
Instagram	83.33%	100.00%
YouTube	83.33%	90.00%
Snapchat	33.33%	50.00%
Reddit	33.33%	20.00%
Facebook	16.67%	30.00%
Whatsapp	0.00%	40.00%
LinkedIn	0.00%	30.00%
Discord	16.67%	0.00%

Tables 3 and 4 show the media consumption patterns of the students who completed the survey. Social media was the most common choice of news medium among the students, with hearing news from friends or by word of mouth also being common among most of the students. Of the social media platforms used, the most popular were Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and X.

**Table 5: Frequency of Political Engagement**

Thinking about the last 12 months how often have you engaged in the following:	% Sometimes/Often		
	Fall 2023	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
Read a newspaper or watched/listened to television/radio news	83.33%	37.50%	50.00%
Talked about politics or government with family or friends	83.33%	50.00%	70.00%
Attended a political meeting, rally, fundraiser or other political event	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
Volunteered to work without pay for a civic or community organization	16.67%	25.00%	0.00%
Participated in a protest, march or public demonstration	0.00%	12.50%	0.00%
Contacted a public official (including by email) to	0.00%	12.50%	0.00%

express your opinion			
Engaged with political content on social media	N/A	25.00%	60.00%

The results in Table 5, however, suggest that none of the students showed an interest in going the extra mile to demonstrate taking action on these views. Specifically, none reported contacting public officials or attending political events like protests or rallies in two of the courses. Only about a minority of the students reported volunteering in civic or community organizations. The highest level of engagement across the three courses was in engaging in media or discussing the issues, although in Summer 2024 only a minority of students reported engaging in media.

**Table 6: Global Empathy**

	% Agree		
	Fall 2023	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
I am aware of how the political and social rights (e.g., ethnic, racial, or gender) of people in other countries can be quite different from my own.	100.00%	75.00%	100.00%
I am aware that people in other countries can have their freedoms or rights taken away.	100.00%	75.00%	100.00%
I feel supportive of those in other countries who may experience injustice because of their political or social (e.g., ethnic, racial, or gender) background.	100.00%	50.00%	100.00%
I know a lot of information about social and political events that happen in countries other than my own.	100.00%	37.50%	40.00%
I share the anger of those in other countries who face injustice because of their political or social (e.g., ethnic, racial, or gender) background.	100.00%	37.50%	100.00%
I am aware of political, social, and economic barriers that lead to discrimination of people in other countries.	83.33%	75.00%	100.00%
I feel motivated to help promote changes that improve people's living conditions in different parts of the world.	83.33%	50.00%	100.00%
I think it's important to hear others' ideas even if I find their ideas very different from mine.	83.33%	87.50%	100.00%
I can see myself taking action (e.g., signing a petition or sending money) to help those in another country who are experiencing discrimination because of their political or social background.	66.67%	37.50%	90.00%
I can relate to the frustration that some people of different countries feel about having fewer opportunities due to the economic, political, or social circumstances of their countries.	50.00%	62.50%	80.00%

I am likely to participate in events that promote equal rights for people in other countries.	50.00%	50.00%	70.00%
It is difficult for me to relate to stories about the political or social discrimination people from different countries face in their day-to-day lives.	33.33%	12.50%	30.00%
It is easy for me to understand what it would feel like to be a person living in a different country than my own.	33.33%	25.00%	100.00%
I feel that being actively involved in global or international issues is my responsibility.	33.33%	37.50%	60.00%
It is difficult for me to relate to people in other countries whose political rights or economic opportunities are quite different from my own.	33.33%	00.00%	20.00%
I am interested in working in a country where injustice, discrimination, or poverty is common.	16.67%	25.00%	50.00%

**Table 7: Individual Empathy**

Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statement:	% Agree	
	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
I can usually figure out when my friends are scared	100.00%	90.00%
I can usually realize quickly when a friend is angry	100.00%	90.00%
When someone is feeling “down” I can usually understand how they feel	100.00%	80.00%
Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place	87.50%	100.00%
I can usually figure out when people are cheerful	87.50%	80.00%
I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective	87.50%	100.00%
I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both	87.50%	100.00%
When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them	87.50%	100.00%
I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make my decision	87.50%	90.00%
I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person	75.00%	60.00%
I am often quite touched by things that I see happen	75.00%	80.00%
When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to “put myself in their shoes” for awhile	62.50%	80.00%
I can learn a lot from people with backgrounds and experiences that are different from mine	62.50%	100.00%
After being with a friend who is sad about something, I usually feel sad	50.00%	60.00%
I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me	50.00%	90.00%
Other people's feelings don't bother me at all	25.00%	0.00%
I don't become sad when I see other people crying	25.00%	10.00%
I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the “other guy's” point of view	12.50%	30.00%
I am not usually aware of my friends feelings	12.50%	30.00%
My friends' emotions don't affect me much	12.50%	0.00%
My friends' unhappiness doesn't make me feel anything	12.50%	0.00%
Sometimes I don't feel sorry for other people when they are having problems	12.50%	10.00%
Other peoples' misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal	12.50%	10.00%

If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments	12.50%	10.00%
When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them	00.00%	10.00%

Tables 6 and 7 show the results for the questions concerning empathy. Keep in mind that for some of the items, a low level of agreement demonstrates a high level of empathy while for others a high level of agreement would correspond with high empathy. For example, agreeing that it is “difficult for me to relate” would demonstrate a low level of empathy while being “easy for me to understand” would demonstrate a high level of empathy. The individual empathy results in Table 7 demonstrate that the students were generally very empathetic people, with none of the questions showing less than half the respondents chose the less empathetic options. The results for global empathy in Table 6 are more complex. They show that most of the students showed a genuine understanding of the importance of being aware of political and social rights issues around the world and reported a sense of community support for other countries' injustice. For several of the questions, one can see that all of the respondents in at least two of the courses answered a few questions with this common theme in the same way. Furthermore, at least 50% displayed a relatively high level of empathy in terms of relating to people in other countries, with most acknowledging that they felt motivated to help. Similar to the results for political engagement, however, feelings of empathy were generally more common than a willingness to take action. Students did indicate willingness for some actions, such as signing a petition, but were a bit less likely to say they would take other actions, such as participate in related events or work in a country experiencing problems. In two of the courses, most did not feel personally responsible to take such actions, and in the third, only 60% said they felt this way. Overall, the results demonstrated that the students were quite empathetic, both at a personal and global level. The global empathy results specifically indicated a high level of understanding and awareness, and some motivation for action, but not necessarily a feeling that these are global problems that they personally need to address.

## Reflection papers

Of the 13 students enrolled in the pilot study course, 11 completed at least one reflection paper. As previously mentioned, these reflections were assigned in weeks 6 and 10 of the course, in order to gauge

the students' empathy throughout, and they were required to respond to at least 3 questions regarding this concept (see appendix for complete assignment instructions). A common theme that we identified in several of the quotes was that students learned new information about other cultures, were able to compare this information to their own experiences, and then connected their new understanding to relevant political activities or beliefs. The following quotes from several of the students' reflections are demonstrative examples of evidence of this common theme throughout the class:

- This made me compare the religious freedom in France versus the religious freedom in the United States. In the United States, there are no laws that would affect me from wearing a cross around my neck. At Wingate, there are multiple Muslim women wearing hijabs that walk around freely at our school. Unfortunately in France, Muslim women and religious groups in general are not afforded the same freedoms. This made me more aware of how political and social rights can differ in other countries from the United States.
- I have learned to comprehend the complexity that breeds injustice, from racial prejudices to gender biases, economic inequalities to political corruption. Understanding these obstacles has increased my motivation to push for change and advance social justice.
- After studying the psychology of race and ethnicity and how it affects others, I've learned much more about how it can have a huge impact on people. I can definitely learn a lot from people with different backgrounds and experiences than mine because I can better understand what they go through and how I can help make a difference to end discrimination and bias.
- I am more motivated to promote change in other parts of the world where people's lives are improved.
- Being an activist can cause you to face repercussions in the United States but it is arguably worse in China. I would not be as brave as them if I lived in China. I believe that this makes me more supportive of people in other countries working against injustices. By doing this they are risking their lives in order to better the lives of others in the same demographic. I believe that by understanding different peoples backgrounds and experiences you can learn a lot about people that are different from you. Taking race and ethnic studies classes and a lot of Asian culture

classes has allowed me to do this. I believe that it is important to try to understand the people around you.

- Studying global injustices has greatly fueled my desire to be a proactive agent for change

Overall, these quotes show at least limited evidence of the course teaching the sort of empathy that allows one to understand others political perspectives, to understand or even appreciate commonalities with identified out-group members, as well as the sort needed to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. Not only did the students think about how the others' experiences compared to their own, but many of them also recognized the need to take action to address the problems that others may be facing.

Some of the reflections did demonstrate evidence that students could not completely empathize with others. That being said, most of the students were quite cognizant of this fact, suggesting that they were not learning the "dark sides" of empathy, such as filtered empathy, or that they were not attributing their own perspective to others in trying to relate to them. The following quotes provide examples of this sort of thinking:

- Although I am unable to fully understand their experiences, the course has given me the skills I need to learn from, support, and listen to them. It has helped me see that the struggle for social justice is a shared endeavor.
- It is personally difficult for me to relate to the stories about political or social discrimination people from different countries face in their day-to-day lives because of the fact that I have never left the country myself and I also have not actively faced those sort of discrimination in ways that would allow me to completely understand or relate to the people of other countries and what they may have had to deal with. All of these topics come back to my interest in intersectionality because of the fact that they show me that even though I am aware of the discrimination and prejudice that people from other counties might face, even if it is discrimination that comes from the US, because of the intersectionality I have for myself, which is a Mixed-American/Multiethnic male, I can not fully relate or understand the problems that others might face even if it does bother me or if I do think that they should not face the discrimination that they face. Since I am not able to relate to others as well as I would like to, it also makes me feel that it would not be easy for me to

help others because I would not know how to address their problems most efficiently and may indirectly make them worse.

In short, not all students felt that they fully understood others, but, at the same time, they recognized this limitation in their learning, and still felt at least some level of empathy and understanding that action to address problems of others may be a shared responsibility.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The pilot study along with the subsequent surveys lend initial evidence that students enrolled in these courses demonstrated several forms of empathetic thinking. These included understanding of others' perspectives, relating to the perspectives of those in other groups in society, and the need to support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Furthermore, many of them reported understanding of the importance of taking political action to address the problems in society that others may face. That being said, most of the students stopped at the level of understanding; they were more hesitant to take action themselves. This indicates some limits to their empathy, but at the same time does mean that the students were not for the most part learning filtered empathy. In fact, one student directly stated that the reason he was hesitant to take action was because he feared inadvertent harm to communities whose perspectives he may not yet fully understand. Evidence of these common themes was present throughout the surveys as well as the reflection papers.

This evidence, however, comes from only a handful of students enrolled in a few courses. We plan to continue to build on the initial evidence from the pilot study in several future courses during multiple terms and across multiple institutions in order to provide more robust evidence. The introduction to comparative politics is typically taught each summer, and the race, ethnicity, and gender politics course is generally taught each fall and spring semester. One change that we plan to make based on the analysis thus far is to conduct the survey at the beginning of the semester as well (students in the spring course have already completed their pre-surveys). That way, in addition to seeing evidence of the students' empathetic thinking mid-way through the semester and near the end, we will also be able to evaluate this as compared to a baseline established at the beginning of the semester.



# References

- Aguilar, Marck Ferdinand, et al. 2022. "Developing Historical Empathy among Political Science Students through Reflection on Human Rights and Martial Law." *International Journal of Global Community* V(2, July).
- Bachen, Christine, Pedro F. Hernandez-Ramos, and Chad Raphael. 2012. "Simulating REAL LIVES: Promoting Global Empathy and Interest in Learning through Simulation Games." *Simulation & Gaming* 43: 437-460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878111432>
- Bandes, Susan. 1996. "Empathy, Narrative and Victim Impact Statements," *University of Chicago Law Review* 63(2), 361-412
- Batson, C. Daniel. 2009. "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related by Distinct Phenomena" in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. Eds. Jean Decety, et al. MIT Press.
- Bennion, Elizabeth A. 2017. "Moving Forward with Assessment: Important Tips and Resources." in *Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines*. Eds. Elizabeth C. Matto, et al. American Political Science Association.
- Bloom, Paul. 2016. *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*. Ecco.
- van Boven, Leaf and George Loewenstein. 2005. "Empathy Gaps in Emotional Perspective Taking," in *Other Minds: How Humans Bridge the Divide between Self and Others*, Bertram F. Malle and Sara D. Hodges, eds. Guilford Press
- Breithaupt, Fritz. 2019. *The Dark Sides of Empathy*. Cornell University Press.
- Brown, Colin, and Chelsea Kaufman. 2023. "Showing the Other Side: What Kinds of Empathy Should Political Science Teach?" American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conference. <https://preprints.apsanet.org/engage/apsa/article-details/63d737d01fe142d9f55e4d3c>
- Caughell, Leslie. 2018. "Teaching Students to Hear the Other Side: Using Web Design and Election Events to Build Empathy in the Political Science Classroom." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 51(3): 659 - 663. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096518000082>
- Cialdini, Robert B., Stephanie L. Brown, Brian P. Lewis, Carol Luce, and Steven L. Neuberg. 1997. "Reinterpreting the Empathy-Altruism Relationship: When One Into One Equals Oneness." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73(3): 481-94. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.73.3.481>.
- Cohen, Geoffrey L. 2022. *Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Crigler, Ann, et al. 2017. "Collaborative Civic Engagement: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Teaching Democracy with Elementary and University Students." in *Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines*. Eds. Elizabeth C. Matto, et al. American Political Science Association.
- Crocco, Margaret, et al. 2018. "Deliberating Public Policy Issues with Adolescents: Classroom Dynamics and Sociocultural Considerations." *Democracy & Education* 26(1).

- Davis, Mark H. 1980. "A Multidimensional Approach to Individual Differences in Empathy." *Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology* 10.
- Decety, Jean, Greg J. Norman, Gary G. Berntson, and John T Cacioppo 2012.. "A Neurobehavioral Evolutionary Perspective on the Mechanisms Underlying Empathy." *Progress in Neurobiology* 98(1): 38–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pneurobio.2012.05.001>.
- Decety, Jean and Jason M. Cowell. 2014. "Friends or Foes: Is Empathy Necessary for Moral Behavior?" *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 9(5): 525-537
- Deutsch, Francine, and Ronald A. Madle. 1975. "Empathy: Historic and Current Conceptualizations, Measurement, and a Cognitive Theoretical Perspective." *Human Development* 18: 267 - 287.
- Givens, Terri E. 2022. *Radical Empathy: Finding a Path to Bridging Racial Divides*. Policy Press.
- Goodin, Robert. 2003. *Reflective Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Hasson, Tossi, et al. 2018. "Are Liberals and Conservatives Equally Motivated to Feel Empathy Towards Others?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*: 1 - 11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672187698>
- Krause, Sharon R. "Empathy, Democratic Politics, and the Impartial Juror." *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 7(1): 81-100
- McCartney, Alison Rios Millett. 2020. ."The Rise of Populism and Teaching for Democracy: Our Obligations." *European Political Science* 19: 236 - 245. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-019-00225-1>
- Monroe, Kristen Renwick, and Maria Luisa Martinez-Marti. 2008. "Empathy, Prejudice, and Fostering Tolerance." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 41(4): 857- 863. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096508081122>
- Morrell, Michael E. 2007. "Empathy and Democratic Education." *Public Affairs Quarterly* 21(4) 381-403.
- Morrell, Michael E. 2010. *Empathy and Democracy: Feeling, Thinking, and Deliberation*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Morris, Stephen G. 2018. "Empathy on Trial: a Response to its Critics." *Philosophical Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2019.1587911>
- Morris, Stephen G. 2020. "Empathy and the Liberal-Conservative Political Divide in the US." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 8(1): 8 - 24. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jsp.p.v8i1.1102>
- Prinz, Jesse. 2011. "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?" in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Eds. P. Goldie and A. Coplan. Oxford University Press.
- Scudder, Mary F. 2020. *Beyond Empathy and Inclusion: The Challenge of Listening in Democratic Deliberation*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Simas, Elizabeth N., Scott Clifford, and Justin H. Kirkland. 2019. "How Empathic Concern Fuels Political Polarization." *American Political Science Review* 114(1): 258 - 269. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000534>
- Sirin, Cigdem V., Nicholas A. Valentino, and José D. Villalobos. 2021. *Seeing Us in Them: Social Divisions and the Politics of Empathy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Suarez, John. 2017. "Promoting Civic Engagement in a Required General Education Course." in *Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines*. Eds. Elizabeth C. Matto, et al. American Political Science Association.

Unger, Lynette S., and Lakshmi Thumuluri. 1997. "Trait Empathy and Continuous Helping: The Case of Voluntarism." *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 12(3)

# Appendix: Reflection Paper Prompt

## Assignment Purpose:

In order to make connections between our lives and the course content, you will be required to research and reflect on two topics of your interest that are relevant to the course. One of these two topics will be your focus for the final infographic.

## Skills gained by completing assignment:

- Connecting real-life examples to concepts introduced in the course
- Summarizing information from multiple sources to formulate a response
- Comparison of differing viewpoints and philosophies
- Building evidence-based arguments

## Instructions:

For this reflection paper, identify a topic of interest to you and discuss how it relates to the content we have been learning in the course so far. Eventually, you will be researching either this topic or the topic from your 2nd reflection paper further for the final project. Make sure to support your points using readings from the class and/or other academic sources. The paper should be at minimum 2 pages double spaced.

As part of the reflection, make sure to address at least **3** of the following questions:

1. Are you more aware of how the political and social rights (e.g., ethnic, racial, or gender) of people in other countries can be quite different from your own? Why or why not?
2. Are you more aware that people in other countries can have their freedoms or rights taken away? Why or why not?
3. Are you more aware of political, social, and economic barriers that lead to discrimination of people in other countries? Why or why not?
4. It is easier for you to understand what it would feel like to be a person living in a different country than your own? Why or why not?
5. Can you relate more to the frustration that some people of different countries feel about having fewer opportunities due to the economic, political, or social circumstances of their countries? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel more motivated now to help promote changes that improve people's living conditions in different parts of the world? Why or why not?
7. Are you more likely to participate in events that promote equal rights for people in other countries? Why or why not?
8. Are you more supportive of those in other countries who may experience injustice because of their political or social (e.g., ethnic, racial, or gender) background? Why or why not?
9. Can you see yourself taking action (e.g., signing a petition or sending money) to help those in another country who are experiencing discrimination because of their political or social background? Why or why not?
10. Do you share the anger of those in other countries who face injustice because of their political or social (e.g., ethnic, racial, or gender) background? Why or why not?
11. Do you feel that being actively involved in global or international issues is your responsibility?

12. Is it difficult for you to relate to stories about the political or social discrimination people from different countries face in their day-to-day lives? Why or why not?
13. Do you know a lot of information about social and political events that happen in countries other than your own?
14. Can you learn a lot from people with backgrounds and experiences that are different from your own?
15. Do you think it's important to hear others' ideas even if you find their ideas very different from your own? Why or why not?
16. Is it more or less difficult for you to relate to people in other countries whose political rights or economic opportunities are quite different from your own? Why or why not?
17. Are you any more interested in working in a country where injustice, discrimination, or poverty is common?

You will be graded as follows:

- Paper addresses a topic relevant to the course and addresses three of the specific questions listed above (60/90)
- Paper has no grammar errors and is approximately 2-3 pages, double-spaced (10/90)
- Supported by at least 3 academic sources and includes proper in-text citations and a works cited list (20/90)
- Refer to the assignment rubric for additional information