TEACHING AND LEARNING

TLC at APSA 2025

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Nearly 150 political science educators convened for a one-day "conference-within-a-conference" to share their pedagogical expertise at the 8th Annual Teaching and Learning Conference at APSA (TLC at APSA). Held on Saturday, September 13, 2025, in Vancouver, Canada, "Teaching Politics, Power, and Peoplehood in Crisis Times," focused on how political science educators can advance students' understanding of democracy and power dynamics within democratic systems, as well as prepare students to adapt and address current crises and challenges facing democratic systems worldwide.

The annual TLC at APSA mini-conference showcases and develops political science teaching practices and advances the scholarship of teaching and learning by creating a welcoming and engaging academic environment. Teacher-scholars who attended TLC at APSA entered a dedicated space to network with fellow practitioners, share best practices, learn new classroom techniques, and build professional relationships to enrich their students' learning opportunities. By building connections with colleagues from a variety of political science subfields, experiences, institutions, and identities, the 2025 TLC at APSA not only produces an exchange of ideas, but promotes a rich community of teacher-scholars within APSA.

This year's program began with a networking breakfast then continued with a series of interactive workshops, a luncheon plenary address, and afternoon panel sessions. Following in the footsteps of APSA's first standalone teaching and learning conference held in 2004 at American University, the afternoon panels followed a track format. Consecutive track sessions organized around core pedagogical themes enable deeper inquiry while fostering connection and engaging discussions. The day's events concluded with an evening reception co-sponsored by APSA, the Political Science Education organized section, and the APSA Committee on the Status of Community Colleges in the Profession.

After breakfast, attendees had the option to participate in the pedagogy café. Modeled after the Methods Café first introduced to the APSA Annual Meeting by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, TLC at APSA's pedagogy café offered small group discussions around a variety of teaching themes. Attendees also had the choice of attending interactive workshop sessions where political science educators could reflect on a range of issues from information literacy in the age of AI, the state of the field of political science education, teaching at community colleges, graduate student pedagogy training, civic education, using OER data, and using games and exercises to teaching about identity.

The plenary address, "Change and Evolution in Teaching and Learning in Political Science," was delivered by Dr. Juan Carlos Huerta (Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi). In his keynote, Dr. Huerta reflected on how teaching and learning has changed in his thirty years in the profession, noting the expansion of the role teaching and learning in the profession and the association and the challenges faced by political science educators. An enlightening question and answer period followed.

In the afternoon, attendees selected from four thematic tracks: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility; 21st Century Skills: Literacy, Analysis, Research, and Writing; Innovations in Active Learning and Democracy; Reimagining Civic Education. The following track summaries draw out the key themes of the presentations and discussions in each track.

The TLC at APSA Program Committee worked with great collegial effort throughout the planning process and during their facilitation of each track. We are grateful for their service: Tavishi Bhasin (Kennesaw State University), Patrick McKinlay (Morningside University), Rolfe Peterson (Susquehanna University), and Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs (Morgan State University). We also thank Michelle Allendoerfer (APSA's Senior Director of Teaching & Learning and Professional Development Programs) for her tireless and attentive efforts in steering the program committee and organizing the conference.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, JUSTICE, AND ACCESSIBILITY

HELEN CHANG, EUGENIO MARÍA DE HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
TAMEYLN TUCKER-WORGS, MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The participants of the "Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility Track" at TLC at APSA engaged in rich discussion on a variety of considerations for making political science classrooms and the discipline inclusive and justice-oriented.

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

The first session explored how the classroom can be a place to enhance students' understanding of human rights and justice, as well as expanding access to education. Erica MacDonald Laplante (University of Connecticut) presented on behalf of her

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and her co-author (Rachel Jackson, University of Connecticut) on their use of the "Encounters Dialogue," a human rights and action learning community that included residential and academic programming for first and second year students. The "Encounters Dialogue" provides a space for students to discuss challenging topics with community collaborators. Their paper, "Encounters in the Classroom: Dialogic Models for Human Rights Education," presented a robust set of evaluations including coursework, observation, interviews, and pre- and post-surveys to assess the programming's effects on pedagogic discomfort, mutual vulnerability, strategic empathy.

The second paper, "Global Classroom: Expanding Educational Access to Forcibly Displaced Students" by Prakash Adhikari (Central Michigan University) and Wendy L. Hansen (University of New Mexico) asked: How can campuses be used to expand college education to forcibly displaced persons? How can college students get involved in expanding education to forced migrants? Partnering with a student-led organization at Central Michigan University, Refugee Outreach Collective, CMU students engaged in a language exchange with Dzaleka refugees in Malawi in 2018. In 2020, Dzaleka students enrolled at CMU as online international students and took hybrid classes with CMU students. Pre- and post-surveys showed that this increased knowledge of international institutions, Malawi, and refugees. The authors conclude by noting the possibility of higher education institutions in addressing a global humanitarian issue of access to education among refugees.

Peter J. Woolley (Fairleigh Dickinson University) and Madelyn Shapiro Ferrans (Fairleigh Dickinson University) presented their paper "Policy Research and Residential Segregation." Woolley and Ferrans have their students investigate residential segregation in a policy research class. The students, working in teams, use data from the US Census and engage with their community to analyze whether residential segregation exists in the community under student, create data visualizations, and present their results.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

In the second session of the afternoon, participants heard from three papers that, together, are a call to action for the discipline to re-consider and incorporate mental health, digital literacy and readiness, and disability into political science education.

In her paper titled "Beyond the Classroom: Combatting Stigma and Empowering Mental Health in Academia," Elsa Talat Khwaja (International Development Scholar and Consultant) issued a call to action for the discipline on mental health. Her paper analyzed mental health as part of a diversity, equity, and inclusion approach. She presented ways to incorporate mental health in academia and inclusive trauma informed pedagogy such as: bibliotherapy, reflexive journaling, peer support networks, and trauma-informed teaching practices. Further, she suggested instructors consider flexible assessment methods, mindfulness practices, and the integration of mental health resources into syllabi.

In the second paper of the session, Dale Mineshima-Lowe (Parami University) began with largely anecdotal experiences with students' digital literacy among faculty and developed it into systematic study about the impact of digital literacy issues on student learning and success in political science courses. Her paper, "Yes, I Use a Mobile Phone!: Reconsidering 'Digital Nativism' for Inclusivity," highlighted the increasing salience of digital literacy, preparation in higher education, and the need to consider digital readiness as part of teaching skills in higher education. She noted that this has an important equity component and offered solutions and recommendations to teaching faculty especially in introductory courses.

The last paper of the afternoon, "Disability Politics in Political Science Pedagogy" by Christopher R. Greenaway (University of Toronto) and Mike Cowan (University of Toronto), presented an important survey and research into the inclusion of disability in syllabi and textbooks. Their key finding is how few syllabi and textbooks include disability. The authors note that, outside of legal compliance with the ADA, this is an understudied topic. They further note that there is an increasing salience of disability and accessibility in higher education that lags behind other developments in identity like gender. They conclude with a call to action for the discipline to study disability politics and issued recommendations on curricular redesigns and ways to embed disability into political science education.

21ST CENTURY SKILLS: LITERACY, ANALYSIS, RESEARCH, AND WRITING

ABIGAIL TETTEH, NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, DEKALB

The "21st Century Skills: Literacy, Analysis, Research, and Writing" track at the TLC at APSA brought together scholars exploring how political science education can adapt to rapidly evolving digital technologies and learning environments. In particular, the track focused on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital tools in shaping student learning, writing, and analytical skills. For the two sessions, "Using AI Effectively in the Political Science Classroom" and "Designing Courses for a Digital Age," presenters addressed both the opportunities and challenges of integrating AI and digital pedagogy into political science instruction.

USING AI EFFECTIVELY IN THE POLITICAL SCIENCE CLASSROOM

Tavishi Bhasin (Kennesaw State University) chaired and moderated the first session, which examined the growing influence of AI on political science pedagogy. Bhasin provided constructive feedback on how AI tools starting with ChatGPT to discipline-specific applications can be used by faculty responsibly and productively in the classroom. The panel opened with the presentation by Jacob P. Wobig (Wingate University) on, "Building Scaffolds, Not Shortcuts: AI in Political Science Writing Assignments." Wobig argued that while AI tools can support student learning, instructors must design assignments that will require critical thinking of students. He demonstrated how AI-assisted writing can be used to teach, structure, argumentation, and revision when embedded within a clear pedagogical framework. Wobig emphasized transparency, instructor modeling, and reflection as key strategies to help students understand AI as a learning partner rather than a replacement for original thought which is crucial in building skillsets of students.

Next, Zora Mihaley (University of California, Irvine) presented "From Chalkboards to Chatbots: Political Science Pedagogy in the Age of AI." Mihaley's presentation traced the historical evolution of instructional technology in political science starting from traditional lectures to digital and AI-enabled

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learning tools. She argued that AI represents a pedagogical paradigm shift comparable to the move from print to digital media. Her paper discussed how AI can democratize access to information and urged faculty to reimagine assessment and feedback practices, encouraging assignments that integrate AI use while maintaining academic integrity.

Janet Marie Lawler (University of Houston) followed with "Teaching Intentionally with AI: Transparency, Authenticity, and Self-Generation." Lawler's central argument was that the introduction of AI requires intentional teaching practices grounded in openness and reflection. She proposed a framework emphasizing three principles: transparency (clearly articulating expectations around AI use), authenticity (connecting AI applications to real-world policy and governance contexts), and self-generation (encouraging students to use AI to augment, not replace, their analytical abilities).

The final presenter, Blair Thomas, presented "The AI in Political Science: How Instructors Are Navigating a New Classroom." Thomas examined how faculty perceive and regulate AI in teaching and assessment. The findings revealed a spectrum of approaches starting from strict prohibition to active integration which showed significant variation in faculty confidence and institutional support. Thomas concluded that professional development and community-building among instructors are essential to establishing shared norms for responsible AI use in higher education.

Before bringing the first session to a close, Bhasin highlighted key points that emerged across the papers, including balancing innovation with academic integrity, addressing equity in access to AI tools, and fostering reflective pedagogy. She commended the presenters for moving the conversation beyond fear of technological displacement toward a proactive engagement with AI as a transformative pedagogical tool.

DESIGNING COURSES FOR A DIGITAL AGE

The second session on "Designing Courses for a Digital Age" was again chaired by Tavishi Bhasin (Kennesaw State University), with Mitchell Brown (Auburn University) serving as the discussant. This session extended the conversation on AI and digital pedagogy by focusing on curriculum design, collaborative learning, and multimodal literacy in the digital era. Presenters examined strategies for embedding digital tools and creative learning formats to enhance engagement and deepen conceptual understanding.

Kris Aaron Beck (Gordon State College) presented "Gen-AI and Student Learning Outcomes." This study investigated the pedagogical implications of generative AI for student learning, emphasizing how faculty can adapt learning outcomes and assessment rubrics to align with AI-assisted learning environments. Using a combination of classroom experiments and student feedback surveys, Beck's presentation revealed that, when properly guided, AI can help students improve synthesis, argumentation, and clarity in writing. However, he emphasized that AI integration must include explicit instruction on ethics, critical use, and verification of information. Beck's co-author Prathibha Joshi (Gordon State College) also joined the conversation and provided more information on how she worked with coders to create the chatbot for the course on which they presented.

The final paper, "Worth a Thousand Words: Graphic Representations in Teaching International Law," was delivered by Spyridon Kotsovilis (University of Toronto Mississauga). Kotsovilis highlighted the pedagogical potential of visual learning and graphic literacy in teaching complex concepts of international law. Using diagrams, flowcharts, and digital mapping tools, he demonstrated how visual representations help students grasp legal frameworks and jurisdictional relationships that are often abstract or text heavy. His work underscored that integrating visual communication skills into political science curricula enhances analytical thinking and supports diverse learning styles.

Discussant Mitchell Brown (Auburn University) reflected on the importance of designing courses that align digital tools with learning objectives rather than adopting technology for its own sake. She noted that the presentations collectively illustrate how intentional design and reflective pedagogy can turn digital innovations into catalysts for deeper engagement and inclusivity in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Across both sessions, all presenters consistently emphasized the effective use of AI within pedagogical goals. The track underscored that 21st-century political science education must prepare students not to solely depend on AI tools but rather use these technological tools to understand and guide their work and not entirely depend on this. This is because students need to develop critical analytical and writing abilities which are required for the job market. Several questions were asked at the end of these sessions, which led to lively discussions and engagements for both track sessions. A major reflection which stood out was how some faculty were rethinking some assignments they graded and how students were innovative in their answers by not relying extensively on AI tools.

INNOVATIONS IN ACTIVE LEARNING

ROLFE DAUS PETERSON, SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY

The Innovations in Active Learning and Democracy track at the Teaching and Learning Conference at APSA provided insight into the diverse pedagogies of active learning. Whether through simulations and games, intensive internships, or hands-on research, active learning remains a versatile tool for the political science classroom.

CLASSROOM AND TEACHING INNOVATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The first panel emphasized new techniques and pedagogies to engage students in comparative politics and the world outside their front door. Petra Hendrickson (Northern Michigan University), presented research entitled "Using Dice Catan to Teach Comparative Political Economy." Their novel approach to active learning revolves around students playing roll and dice strategy game Dice Catan across one class period as an avenue for understanding political development. Hendrickson uses multiple iterations of the game to help students develop a strategy for development as well as helping students engage with the limitations of leadership and struggle of development for countries. To gauge the learning outcomes from the games, Hendrickson employs pre-post surveys asking students questions about their understanding of development and strategies. In quantitative measures, Hendrickson found that students had modest gains in understanding the role of strategy in development, but they had a statistically significant increase in their recognition of the way luck and chance can shape development outcomes. Hendrickson argues that putting students in the role of leader in Dice Cat-

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an deepened student appreciation of the challenges of global development. Titus Alexander (Democracy Matters), presented their pedagogical approach and call to arms toward global mindedness for students in "The Power of Questions and Stories for Teaching Politics." For Alexander, political science pedagogy is most powerful when we ask applied questions and task students with active engagement in global perspectives. Joseph W. Roberts (Roger Williams University), served as a discussant on the panel and led a lively discussion on the active learning threads between the papers. Roberts' expertise in board gaming and simulations in the classroom allowed him to provide an overview of the potential for games in active learning while engaging the audience in the conversation and leading Q&A.

GAMES, SIMULATIONS, AND INTENSIVE INTERNSHIP APPROACHES TO ACTIVE LEARNING

The second panel featured three papers that highlight the uniquely flexible nature of active learning. In their presentation "Solving Human Rights Atrocities: A Problem Based Learning Simulation," Zachary House (Boise State University), presented pedagogical research on a global politics simulation where students are tasked with responding to China's human rights violations against the Uyghurs. The problem-based simulation puts students in the role of countries working to address human rights violations, while balancing the constraints and limits of influence in a global system and governing structure of the United Nations. House and his coauthor Ghita Chairabi (University of Virginia), report results from a pre-post survey design on the learning outcomes gathered across courses at three universities. Overwhelming majorities of their students surveyed responded favorably to the simulation. One of the key take-aways was in students recognizing the challenges of addressing humanitarian issues with 76% of the students strongly agreeing with the statement that the "activity helped them better understand why countries do not do more to address human rights violations abroad." Even with this lesson in constraints, 78% of students agreed that the activity should be used in future courses.

In our second paper, Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan (University of South Florida), presented their innovative and intensive active learning internship experience "The Road to the White House." McLauchlan created a one-of-a-kind campaign and course experience where students take a course and make the trek to New Hampshire for the presidential primary for a credit-bearing internship. Student cohorts from South Florida made the trek to New Hampshire in January in most of the elections since the 2004, with cohorts in 2012 and 2024 working in the Florida and South Carolina primaries, respectively. Students intern with campaigns, meet the candidates, and share in the heat of the campaign for the month preceding Election Day. The Road to the White House is an intensive form of active learning with a preparation course, a host of logistics and planning, as well as a host of assessments and activities for students during the internship and when they return to South Florida. Our final paper of the conference uses active learning to hone student research skills. Megan Becker (University of Southern California), presented on their assignment to help students learn qualitative research techniques in "Causal Mechanisms and Transparent Process-Tracing in the Classroom." One universal challenge of teaching research methods to undergraduate students rests in the ability to help students make sound causal claims in qualitative research. Becker's deft approach embeds the methods learned in a topical course on civil wars and engages directly with students in the method of process tracing. Providing students with a structure and codebook, Becker tasks students with case studies and testing of hypotheses on the duration of civil wars and effects of outside actors. The students then enter and code cases as to what hypotheses are supported or unsupported by their cases. Becker embeds a number of pedagogical techniques into the assignments including peer comparison, scaffolded assignments, and reflection. Petra Hendrickson (Northern Michigan University), served as discussant on the diverse and rich panel of active learning approaches. With a positive tone and constructive feedback, Hendrickson urged Houser on the refinement and alterations of the simulation activity, queried McLauchlan on the logistics and intensity of campaign experience, and probed Becker on the mechanics of balancing course content with methods training. Overall, the panel displayed again the diversity and variety of approaches to improving pedagogy through active learning.

REIMAGINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

PATRICK F. MCKINLAY, MORNINSIDE UNIVERSITY
ELIZABETH A. BENNION, INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTH BEND
JUDITHANNE S. MCLAUCHLAN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

In the "Reimaging Civic Engagement Track" panelists endeavored to respond to the TLC at APSA theme, "Teaching Politics, Power, and Peoplehood in Crisis Times." Many of the panelists experimented with new pedagogies geared toward helping students understand democracy and the challenges to democratic citizenship. How can civic engagement practices, in quite diverse educational and subfield settings, expand opportunities for exploring democratic practice, especially deliberation and contestation? What might these pedagogies mean for countering toxic polarization and entrenched dispositions that undermine democratic discourse?

REIMAGINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: PANEL 1

In the first panel, Michael Evans, Jennifer McCoy, Jongwoo Jeong, and Alexander Whitford Leasure (Georgia State University) examined many of these themes in their paper, "The Impact of Civil Discourse Assignments on Democratic Attitudes and Polarization." The paper examines whether brief, scalable discourse activities can shift democratic dispositions in large enrollment university courses. They studied the impact of Unify America College Bowl (https://www.unifyamerica.org/civic-gym-unify-challenge), Constructive Dialogue Institute's Perspectives Modules (https://constructivedialogue.org/perspectives/), and *Tangle News* newsletter (https://www.readtangle.com/) on outcomes including affective and pernicious polarization, support for free expression, dialogue confidence, intentions to engage, openness to dialogue, and intellectual humility.

Previous research had shown that direct-dialogue models such as Unify America's College Bowl could lower affective polarization, but these studies required more training, class time, and facilitation.

In this study randomly assigned students participated in the depolarizing assignments in large enrollment American Government courses in the fall 2024 and in the spring 2025 semesters. The findings suggest that brief, externally supported activi-

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ties can foster democratic dispositions in mass higher-education contexts, but success is contingent on timing, sequencing, and matching strategies.

REIMAGINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: PANEL 2

This panel examined diverse strategies for cultivating civic engagement through experiential learning and skill development. David Selby (California State University, Sacramento) argued in "Teaching Policy Analysis from Alexis de Tocqueville to Dunning-Kruger" that policy analysis itself can serve as civic engagement by fostering cognitive skills to counter misinformation and ideological extremism. Drawing on Tocqueville and the Dunning-Kruger Effect, Selby described classroom projects that challenge students to research policy alternatives, promoting metacognitive accuracy and moderation of political judgment. Matthew Stein (College of Southern Nevada) and Jeremy Bowling (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) in "College and Civic Engagement: Does Early College Matter?" explored whether early college experiences, such as AP courses and dual enrollment, shape civic engagement later in life. Their Quadripartite Model emphasizes knowledge acquisition, skill development, political efficacy, and habituation, suggesting that higher education can compensate for gaps in prior socialization and foster durable participatory habits. Michele Calderon (University of Maryland Baltimore County and Jess Jorden (Townson University) assessed the impact of a free Model United Nations program on high school students' civic, college, and career readiness. Survey data revealed perceived gains in global civic engagement and academic skills, particularly among students from less affluent communities, highlighting the program's potential as an equity-oriented enrichment initiative. Such programs may provide leveling mechanisms through accessible, structured activities that help build civic and academic skills. Also, the study invites greater attention that learning outcomes may also be influenced by community context, highlighting the importance of socio-economic circumstances when expanding enrichment programs.

Taken together, the panels in this track highlight a shared commitment to reimagining civic engagement as both a pedagogical and democratic imperative. Through approaches such as structured dialogue, policy analysis, early college experiences, and equity-focused enrichment programs, scholars demonstrated how intentional design can bridge theory and practice. These innovations aim not only to deepen students' understanding of democracy but also to counter polarization and cultivate the habits of mind essential for democratic resilience. ■






Top left: Co-Chairs Alison Rios Millet McCartney and Erin Richards speaking at TLC at APSA. Top right: Kimberly MacVaugh, speaking at TLC at APSA. Bottom left: Attendees at the TLC Reception. Bottom right: Patrick McKinlay & Juan "Carlos" Huerta at the TLC Reception.

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