

# **Bringing Scholarship to the Classroom: Strategies for promoting research through teaching**

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An issue all academics grapple with is how to strike the desired balance between research and teaching. This balance is heavily influenced by the type of institution where one seeks employment. At liberal arts colleges, excellence is expected in the classroom and a premium is put on faculty student interaction. The expectation, however, is to be teacher-scholar, not simply teacher. And indeed, the desire of most professors at liberal arts colleges is to remain active in their field. With limited time and large teaching demands, the challenge becomes one of continuously making progress on one's research agenda. When asked to consider how to connect scholarship and teaching on the "Bringing Scholarship to the Classroom: Japan Studies" panel at the ASIANetwork conference in March 2008, I realized I had developed several strategies to link my research and teaching. What I also realized was that all these strategies were influenced by the fact that I was a junior professor vying for tenure. That is, my motivation for connecting scholarship and teaching was largely instrumental. In addition to being able to speak more passionately about topics we research and therefore engage students more fully, I would argue that finding ways to incorporate one's research in as many classes as possible is a way to better tackle the dual role of teacher-scholar. Connecting research and teaching can accelerate one's research

agenda simply by preventing the liberal arts professor from being torn in too many different directions.

I am a professor of political science with a specialty in comparative politics and a focus on Japan. My research focuses on political reform, political leadership and women and politics, mainly in Japan but also in comparative perspective. My teaching repertoire includes “Introduction to Comparative Politics,” “Contemporary Japanese Politics,” “The Chinese Cultural Revolution” and a senior capstone on political leadership. During my time at Southwestern University, I have experimented with the following strategies for connecting scholarship and teaching:

- Develop a course on a theoretical topic related to your research
- Develop an assignment that targets your research
- Invite guest speakers in your specialized field to complement course material as well as expand personal networks
- Apply for grants to do faculty-student collaborative research
- Co-author conference papers with students
- Direct independent studies related to your research

Connecting research and teaching is not an easy task and does have both benefits and costs. I do not claim to be an expert on this topic. In this essay, however, I will consider the positive and negative sides of strategies I have experimented with for using teaching as a tool to promote my research.

### **Course Development**

The first strategy for connecting my research to my teaching centers on course development. When asked to teach the senior capstone seminar for political science majors during my second year at Southwestern, I chose to develop a course on political leadership. The course explores political leadership from several

different perspectives with an emphasis on connecting a variety of subfields in political science, including American politics, political theory, comparative politics and international relations. I chose to develop a course on this topic at the same time I was revising my dissertation into a book manuscript. The theory chapter of my dissertation focused on political reform. One of the main revision tasks I faced was incorporating a more thorough discussion of political leadership, my answer as to when and why politicians pass reform legislation. By developing a course on political leadership, I was able to use the course to help me revise the introduction to my book manuscript.

Developing a course on a theoretical topic related to my research had benefits and costs. On the positive side, the advanced nature of the course allowed me to assign challenging readings related to my own work. In particular, I was able to assign new books on the topic, published after the completion of my dissertation. The intellectual exercise of developing a syllabus on political leadership helped me trace the main debates in political science on this topic. At the end of the course I had clear sense of what a political leadership literature review required. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, teaching a course directly related to my research reduced the amount of time and energy needed to switch modes from teaching to research.

Such course development did have some limitations in terms of furthering my research agenda. First, the course content only covered a fragment of the relevant theoretical literature. Moreover, to make a cohesive capstone course, I was only able to consider topics directly related to my research in two of our weekly class meetings, when we discussed legislative leadership and prime ministerial leadership. Other class meetings covered types of leadership more tangential to my work, including charismatic leadership and revolutionary leadership. In addition, since I was working through new material at the same time I was teaching the course, the course direction was

unclear at times. This is often the case in any new course, perhaps more so in courses unrelated to one's research.

The second strategy for connecting my research and teaching involved developing a course assignment related to my area of expertise. Specifically, in my "Contemporary Japanese Politics" course I had students write a ten page research paper analyzing the actions of a postwar Japanese prime minister in an issue area central to the prime minister's administration. The goal of the analysis was to draw conclusions about the power of prime ministers in postwar Japan.

This strategy has allowed me to share my expertise with my students. In this sophomore-level class, many students are not experienced researchers. By choosing a topic I had researched extensively, I was better able to assist students. I could suggest prime ministers and issues areas as well as provide students with citations to get them started. Finally, to a certain extent, the students' papers expanded my knowledge of prime ministers and policy areas of interest. The only frustration I have had with this strategy is that students often adopt the position presented in my own work on the topic. The students seem less willing to think independently when in the professor's area of expertise.

### **Guest Lecturers**

Another way to connect scholarship to the classroom as well as expand personal networks is to sponsor lectures on topics related to one's own work. With funds from the Luce Foundation, I was able to organize lectures by Richard Samuels on political leadership in Japan, Ellis Krauss on Koizumi and the LDP, and T.J. Pempel on Japanese politics more broadly. While these funds have expired, I continue to raise funds from various departments and programs to sponsor lectures on Japanese politics.

An extremely positive aspect of sponsoring guest lectures is that these talks bring course content to life. Lectures can also provide a different perspective from that of the instructor.

As mentioned above, lectures can expand personal networks in your field as well as increase your college's visibility. It can be especially helpful to students considering graduate school, to interact with professors from research universities. The most prohibitive factor related to this strategy is that it requires financial resources. It also requires the faculty member to master organizational detail, which takes time away from research and writing.

### **Faculty-Student Research**

Grants for faculty-student research are perhaps the most direct ways to connect research to teaching. In my second year at Southwestern, I received an ASIANetwork Freeman Foundation Faculty-Student Collaborative Research grant to explore political leadership in Japan. When developing the grant proposal, it became clear that it would be most beneficial to all parties involved to carry out research about one of my own scholarly interests. Within the general theme of political leadership though, I allowed students to choose their own specific topics, ones that did not have to be related to my own work.

The ASIANetwork Freeman Foundation grant furthered my research in several ways. To begin with, it funded a research trip to Japan. I was able to extend my time in Japan to conduct personal research following the faculty-student group research. Much to my surprise, having students involved in the research process also expanded my interview connections as many politicians were intrigued by a group of American college students interested in Japanese politics and thus, granted us interviews for this reason. Since some of the students' projects were connected to my research, I have been able to maintain interview contacts that students initially secured. Finally, the project allowed me to experiment with using a translator in elite interviews. I am proficient in Japanese, but I found that having a native speaker as a translator/research assistant greatly increased the speed and accuracy of my work, especially on a short research trip to Japan. I have continued to use research

assistance by a native speaker as a budget item on other grant proposals with great success.

Faculty-student research did pose some difficulties from my perspective as a researcher. First, student topics often differed greatly from my own research agenda, reducing the usefulness of interviews conducted on these topics. The students did not speak Japanese and were not familiar with Japanese culture. The inability to communicate in Japanese often limited our group research, although this was somewhat attenuated by the use of translators. Finally, when conducting field research with students, a professor's professional reputation becomes connected to the students' ability to conduct their first field research project.

The two final strategies for linking research and teaching I have used were connected—writing a co-authored conference paper and directing an independent study. When working with the students on the ASIANetwork Freeman grant, one student and I applied for additional funding from Southwestern to develop a co-authored conference paper that we presented at the Association of Asian Studies. We worked on this project as an independent study. On the positive side, co-authorship allows professors to mentor aspiring graduate students. Close work with students also exposes professors to the strengths and weaknesses in undergraduate research training. The weaknesses in particular can be targeted in future course assignments. For example, I developed a step by step guide for writing political science literature reviews after working with this student. Independent studies can also build one's familiarity with a new theoretical literature or empirical case.

One of the largest costs of faculty-student research, however, is that it often requires more time to mentor a student than to complete a single authored work. In addition, the success of the project is contingent on the student's ability to carry out research at the graduate level, something that is particularly complicated in Asian Studies due to the language skills required for such research. Finally, as is true of collaborative field research in general, the professor's professional reputation becomes

linked to the student's ability to conduct research as well as write at the graduate level.

As I have already mentioned, I am not an expert on connecting teaching and research. The above strategies have been experiments in my early career as I attempt to fulfill the requirements for acting as a teacher-scholar. Upon reflection, I would argue that the development of a course on a theoretical topic related to my research had the greatest benefits with the least number of costs in terms of promoting my research agenda and increasing my productivity. The faculty-student grant also aided my research, especially in terms of providing travel to Japan and new interview contacts, but the language limitations of my students restricted the overall depth of this project. While many of the strategies have only promoted my research in limited ways, all have allowed me to enrich my teaching by relying upon my own expertise, something that creates satisfaction for the professor and student alike.