

POLITICAL SCIENCE/SOCIOLOGY

International Political Economy (POLI 372)

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Mentor: Trudelle Thomas, Ph.D. (English)

Interactions with Mentor (Trudelle Thomas)

- knew Mentor from previous discussions about writing (we coauthored a piece on writing for Grapevine)
- met numerous times, got to know Trudelle, her son Gabe and husband Bill better
- discussed Ignatian values from our respective faith traditions (Muslim and Christian)
- wrote regularly and extensively in an intense, exploratory journal
- traded written reflections on our personal journeys
- considering co-authoring another article that draws on this experience

The course: International Political Economy (IPE)

- Upper-level course examines how economics and politics interact internationally
- challenging because it is heavy on theory and jargon
- students sometimes don't relate to course material
- need to show relevance, where the rubber meets the ground
- wanted students to feel empowered as agents of social change
- wanted students to grapple with ethical trade-offs and choices

Specific Change 1: Philanthropy Grant

- Philanthropy Grant Program: class gets \$4000 to give to a nonprofit (technically a 501(c)(3)) organization in the Cincinnati area
- Decided to pursue this as a way to engage students directly with community organizations
- with students, decided to focus on recent immigrant needs; worked on grant mission statement; brainstormed possible organizations; sent Request For Proposals
- narrowed down to 4 organizations, students currently busy with site visits; have lively discussions; students take their task seriously, and have volunteered to put in extra time
- class looks at big macro picture, and this is about the local micro effects; some disconnects but overall student engagement with issues has increased
- has produced deliberation over values and preferences as students try to make choices between different yet worthy programs

Specific Change 2: Nicaragua Interactions

- met with Nicaragua Service Learning Program (NSL) students at the semester's start, and their leader Irene Hodgson; outlined basics in International Political Economy
- Discussed collaboration; agreed that students in Nicaragua would send my class two case studies by a set date; IPE students would respond with analysis and questions; NSL students would respond to the response; IPE students would send a response to that
- IPE and NSL students would meet in person at a gathering at the end of the semester for further conversation
- Goal was to increase student engagement by relating to their peers in another program overseas, and to increase their sense that the cases are real, live, current, and significant
- Another goal was to demonstrate that IPE analytical tools have direct, relevant implications for understanding world situations

Specific Change 3: Student Ownership Over Decisions

- at several points when group decisions had to be made regarding the Philanthropy Grant process, decision-making suffered confusion and grid-lock
- students aware of the Arrow Theorem: majority voting is subject to strategic manipulation or arbitrary results where there are more than two voters and more than two choices placed in rank order; the resulting “cycling majorities” problem means that there is no obviously superior how-to rule in group decision-making
- partly from time constraints, and partly to give students ownership, I simply set a deadline (eg., 25 mins), and said if by that time they hadn’t come up with an answer, I would impose a decision-rule
- in every case, students came up with a group decision
- students gained experience in group deliberation, decision-making, and responsibility
- I also learned to trust my students as capable, responsible decision-makers

Overall Impact

- enriching, bonding experience with mentor
- expect to continue conversations, and do more coauthoring
- develop community involvement as strategy to generate interest and engagement with course material
- students more aware that analysis can inform ethical choices; enhanced the informed value judgment component in classroom discussion and student writing
- more interdisciplinary/cross-course connections as way to enhance student learning
- greater mutual trust and sense of common purpose between students and instructor