

How Do Jesuit Values Matter in a Political Science Class?

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Political science is primarily concerned with the study of the state, nation, government, and politics and policies of government. As the discipline is increasingly reshaped by a paradigm shift toward empirical analysis guided by the scientific method, one might doubt the feasibility of incorporating the core Jesuit principles into teaching a political science class. However, by embedding the four values of *magis*, *discernment*, *solidarity and kinship*, and *personal reflection* in the way I teach my Introduction to Comparative Politics (POLI120), I found that the Jesuit tradition could be smoothly woven into the teaching and learning experience in a political science class. Further, these Jesuit values motivated me to more closely engage the students and encourage them to extend the learning process beyond the classroom.

I. *Magis, Discernment, Solidarity and Kinship, and Personal Reflection*

Magis: how can I learn more about this topic?

In Latin, *magis* literally means “the more”. Ignatius used the term *magis* as a call to excellence, and a push beyond “good enough.” In the process of improving my teaching, I translate *magis* into encouraging students to strive for a deeper understanding of the essence of political science, as well as an increased depth and breadth of knowledge. Learning more from a political science class requires the students to reach beyond the mere memorization of knowledge through looking into the causes, effects, and implications of political realities.

Discernment: what is the question you are passionate about and how will you pursue the answer/answers?

Discernment can be understood as giving conscious attention to our inner feelings, our intellect and our will. Moreover, in a political science class, discernment ultimately leads to the question of what is the question one is passionate about regarding the political realities of our world. After students are exposed to the concepts, theories, and debates of political science, they are eager to observe the world with the new intellectual tools they have acquired. With so many young minds ready to discern, I feel my teaching must create the opportunities for students to challenge themselves and exceed themselves by asking them to identify the questions they are interested in and pursue the answer/answers.

Solidarity and Kinship: how can I go beyond the pursuit of knowledge in the classroom and apply that knowledge to real issues of our world?

Rooted in the Jesuit education tradition, *solidarity and kinship* requires students to go beyond the pursuit of knowledge in the classroom and apply that knowledge to the issues that confront our society. This means that our education should meet particular societal needs by preparing our students for living in solidarity with fellow human beings

and contributing to positive changes that benefit the society. Thus, I realize my teaching must incorporate more discussions and exercises regarding real issues of the world.

Personal Reflection: what new perspectives have I gained regarding my understanding of the real world?

During the first couple of years of my teaching at Xavier, I used to spend a tremendous amount of time and energy in ensuring that my students grasp the various concepts, theories, and issues of the discipline of political science, which ignored an utmost issue: what new perspectives have they gained regarding their understanding of the real world? In addition, how does learning my course contribute to their development of intellectual maturity? By keeping *personal reflection* in mind, when preparing a lecture, I habitually ask myself how I can use the materials to encourage more meaningful discussions and critical thinking among my students.

II. *Magis* in a Multi-media Project

In order to improve my teaching with Jesuit values such as *magis, discernment, solidarity and kinship, and personal reflection*, I assigned a multi-media project to both sections of my Introduction to Comparative Politics (POLI120) in fall 2012 and spring 2013. This multi-media project is essentially a research design, which requires the students to work in small groups to choose and answer a research question. Eventually, all groups will share their research design and preliminary findings in a PowerPoint presentation. A summary of the instructions of this project is attached below. The Multi-media project grading rubrics are attached in Appendix A.

- This project accounts for 25% of your overall course grade.
- Topics will involve a significant question relevant to comparative politics.
- Each and every student must work in a group of 4 people.
- Each group is expected to conduct a research, collect relevant information, make a PowerPoint, and present the findings.
- Each person is responsible for 3---4slides, and each group must produce a PowerPoint presentation of 12---16 slides.
- Each group will take approximately 15---20 minutes to present the work. In addition, the group is also expected to respond to questions and comments from other students.
- All group members must participate in every step of the of this research project: conducting the research, collecting the information, making the PowerPoint, presenting the findings, and responding to questions and comments.
- A hard copy of the PowerPoint is due on the day of the presentation. You must also email a copy of the PowerPoint to Yub@xavier.edu on the same day of your presentation.
- Your project must include the following components:
 - *Raise a research question.* The research question must be relevant to the study of comparative politics.
 - *How would you answer this question?* Present at least three hypotheses. Make sure you identify and define the dependent variable and independent variables in your research. You may want to start by discussing if this question was already addressed by existing literature. If so, provide a brief review of the

literature (How this question was answered by existing studies).

- *How would you measure the variables in your research?* What kind of evidence do you collect in order to test your hypotheses? Make sure you specify what you would expect to find in the evidence if your hypotheses are true.

- *Data collection and analysis.* Collect the data (For the purpose of this project, we only focus on one single country) and analyze if your specified expectations are met or not met by the evidence. Based on the data you collect, do you think the evidence is consistent, or inconsistent, or mixed, or inconclusive?

- *References:* you must cite a minimum of 10 references.

- *To enhance your presentation,* you are encouraged to use movie clips, music, songs, poems, etc in your presentation.

- *Report the findings and discuss the significance* of this study. You may want to answer the following questions in your conclusion. What kind of conclusions would you draw from the results? Why and how does it matter to the study of comparative politics? Could your research findings offer some policy prescriptions for policy makers? Was the research project limited by any factors? What can be done in the future in order to improve our understanding of this problem?

III. Results

By incorporating *magis, discernment, kinship and solidarity, and personal reflection* into my teaching, especially by developing a multi-media research project in the syllabus of my *Introduction to Comparative Politics* (POLI120), I have encouraged my students to learn more from the discipline of political science and challenged them to go beyond the pursuit of knowledge in the classroom and apply what they have learned to real issues of our world. Further, this multi-media project helped to inspire more students to be interested in political science. Finally, this project also makes an effort to improve the quantitative literacy of the students and enhanced their critical thinking abilities.

Appendix A: Multi-media Project Grading Rubrics

Grading Rubrics	Percentage
Focus on <i>a single research question</i> relevant to the study of Comparative Politics. The research question should be adequately described at the beginning of PPT.	10%
Provide <i>at least three (>=) testable hypotheses</i>	30%
Operationalize key concepts: The project should make serious efforts at <i>operationalizing (defining+measuring) key concepts</i> (Dependent variable, independent variables, and intervening variable, if applicable)	30%
Explain the <i>causal mechanism/mechanisms</i> : How do changes in the independent variables result in changes in the dependent variable? Tell a good empirical story here!	20%
Present the project effectively: be creative and have fun!	5%
Provide a minimum of <i>10 references</i>	5%
Total	100%