

Tools to Expand Political Science Education: "Building an Inclusive Syllabus" Webinar Highlights

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The development and improvement of inclusive pedagogical knowledge, curriculum, and practices, as well as the growth and sustainment of discipline diversity through political science education and instruction, are [core APSA goals](#) (Dianne M. Pinderhughes, Luis Ricardo Fraga, & Terri E. Givens, "Political Science in the 21st Century:" Report of the Task force on Political Science in the 21st Century, APSA, October 2011).

On October 27, 2021, APSA held the webinar, "Building an Inclusive Syllabus," featuring five expert scholar-educators committed both to inclusive teaching in their classroom and the mentorship of fellow political science instructors. Moderator Kimberly Mealy (APSA Senior Director of Diversity and Inclusion Programs) was joined by Veronica Reyna (Professor and Associate Chair, Department of Government, Houston Community College), Linda Hasunuma (Assistant Director, Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Temple University), Todd Shaw (Associate Professor of Political Science and African American Studies, University of South Carolina), and Louis DiSipio (Professor of Political Science and Professor and Chair of Chicano/Latino Studies, University of California, Irvine). The panelists provided practical tips and suggestions for political science educators from all subfields to develop strategies to deliberately build a classroom environment ensuring equal access to knowledge, shared tools to build and sustain courses that are inclusive of the contributions of historically excluded scholars, and discussed assignments or activities that incorporated the investigation of race, gender, identity, and power into the core political science curriculum.

The rest of this webinar summary covers a few of the event's key points and looks at how these ideas contribute to new directions in political science instruction. Throughout the discussion our panelists mentioned many resources, templates, and other materials instructors could use in their courses. We invite you to view resources as well as the recording of the webinar on our digital teaching library, [APSA Educate](#).

WHY SHOULD POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATORS CENTER INCLUSIVE TEACHING?

Inclusive political science instruction, our panelists suggested, is intellectually honest, empowers students, expands and diversifies the political science pipeline, and strengthens civil society.

Political science, Louis DiSipio stated, cannot accurately understand or explain political phenomena without being inclusive of historically exploited groups' contributions to politics. While the political science discipline may not have always embraced this position, it is still an empirical reality. Taking these intellectual commitments seriously, DiSipio continued, not only improves our discipline's capacity to understand our world, it provides pedagogical dividends. It is important to recognize the multiple voices, histories, and agencies of everyone participating in the course because it allows students to see themselves in the course.

“ The syllabus is the first impression you make on your students—it identifies who you are, what you value, and you signal to your students who belongs and who doesn't. Your students will see your syllabus and immediately make a judgment if they belong, if their knowledge will be important and, if their experiences are valued.

—Linda Hasunuma

Veronica Reyna then shared her experience as an instructor at an open enrollment, predominantly minority serving, urban community college. Diverse materials, inclusive of the contribution historically excluded scholars have made to our discipline, and those that investigate questions of power, intersectionality, inequality, she argued, empower her students to be effective civic leaders.

Todd Shaw extended Reyna's point about civic education. Our political science courses are bridges students cross to civil, economic, and political society. They either will leave with the capacity to understand and act as political citizens, or they will be inactive. Instructors, he suggested, are an extension of that institutional bridge. "Our syllabus," Shaw remarked, "is a formal



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Building an Inclusive Syllabus

A Joint Teaching & Learning and Diversity & Inclusion Webinar



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DR. LOUIS DESIPIO

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compact between the instructor and the student. If that compact is inclusive then the outcomes can be inclusive.” Inclusive instruction strengthens pluralist democracy.

WHAT ARE SOME KEY FEATURES TO DESIGNING AND SUSTAINING AN INCLUSIVE SYLLABUS?

Inclusive design involves intentional instruction, self reflection and adjustments, and, when possible, using open education resources.

Linda Hasunuma suggested faculty could develop meaningful instructor-student connections by including a diversity statement to open their syllabus to show that you value different perspectives and experiences in the class. Using her statement to identify as, and explain the meaning of, a first-generation scholar in the academy, she is able to establish a launching point to set aside classroom time throughout her course to discuss the hidden-professional curriculum. To encourage and develop an open classroom culture prepared to hold what can often be difficult discussions, she discusses using the “Hopes & Fears” exercise—a structured activity allowing students to anonymously reflect on their expectations and anxieties when discussing politics. A third tool Hasunuma uses is a pre-course survey to learn more about her students’ identities, lives, time commitments, and any potential barriers to their learning. Veronica Reyna shared that she constructs a ‘double-syllabus.’ While one syllabus she produces is the regular text form we all are familiar with, her second syllabus includes the headshots of all of the authors she assigns in her courses. This added step ensures she actively selects content produced by a diverse range of social scientists, but also allows the students to see who she chooses to represent as authorities of political science knowledge. Reyna also discussed how to use backwards design when developing course syllabi to center inclusive pedagogy. By setting inclusive learning objectives and outcomes upfront, instructors can build the reading, assignments, assessments, and in class materials in reverse.

Todd Shaw explained how he intentionally sets the course in a specific manner. When teaching American politics he explains the pivot points, alternative theoretical routes, and explains why he is intentionally setting the course in this specific way to his students. Shaw also makes clear how these choices are connected to equity. This openness, he finds, is then returned from students in productive ways, allowing him to refine and update his courses.

All five of the panelists’ advocated using open education resources, when possible, to reduce course barriers. Kimberly Mealy shared how virtual communication allows faculty to more easily invite guest speakers who can share expertise and lived

experiences to their courses. Linda Hasunuma and Veronica Reyna both advocated for the use of multimedia content, and shared how they collaborated with campus librarians to help curate this content. Panelists also connected open education resources to a theme discussed in the first answer—bandwidth recovery. By turning to dynamic content types like primary resources, public scholarship, podcasts, photo essays and films, students gain additional access points to knowledge.

HOW CAN DEPARTMENTS, UNIVERSITIES, AND ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORT INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION?

Political scientists in leadership and influential positions can support inclusive instruction by investing in and using department-created syllabi templates and teaching resources and curriculum. They can also advocate for awards and other promotion standards to reward inclusive instruction.

Intentional inclusive teaching, self reflection, and adjustments, Veronica Reyna noted, are labor intensive. Our panelists agreed that to ensure graduate students and faculty invest in these practices, our disciplinary institutions should support this work. Reyna shared how she and other members of her department leadership team designed inclusive model courses for the rest of its nearly 80-member faculty to use as templates. Todd Shaw added that political scientists in leadership positions should work to prioritize inclusive teaching in promotion standards. Linda Hasunuma suggested political scientists think about what campus awards and association awards signal, and to use your service as reviewers for these awards to recognize and celebrate this work.

“ Inclusive teaching is not only a deliberative process but requires constant self-reflection and ongoing reassessment.
—Louis DeSiPIO ”

CONCLUSION & STEPS FORWARD

Throughout the webinar, the panelists highlighted the importance of continued self-reflection to keep a syllabus and a course inclusive. Although these efforts take time, the result is invaluable for students. Instructors can take advantage of existing resources—such as APSA’s organized sections’ syllabi banks, APSA Educate, and resources like Women Also Know Stuff and People of Color Also Know Stuff, APSA’s Resources on Systemic Racism and Social Justice, and The Monkey Cage Topic Guides—to support their efforts. ■

This APSA event was cosponsored by APSA Diversity & Inclusion and Academic & Professional Development Program Teams. If you have inclusive teaching resources you would like to share, please email educate@apsanet.org. We also welcome pitches for other workshops, symposia, roundtables and webinars focused on inclusive teaching at teaching@apsanet.org.