



# The Western

Newsletter of the Western Political Science Association  
Volume 3, Issue 1. Spring, 2011  
<http://www.csus.edu/org/wpsa>

## Notes from the Editors

As the *Western* continues to develop as the newsletter of the Western Political Science Association, we are pleased with the response we have received from authors for various sections of the newsletter. We encourage more submissions of small articles on western politics, teaching issues, or other related topics. Submission instructions are listed at the end of this issue. In this issue, we highlight the upcoming WPSA conference in San Antonio. We hope to see you there in April. In this edition we have an article in our **Western Educator** section by Dr. Lawrence Becker from CSU Northridge that addresses the question of technological differences between students and faculty.

As a final note, we are pleased to serve as the outlet for Association news and announcements from members. As part of this we wish to draw your attention to the **Political Research Quarterly OnlineFirst** capabilities where articles accepted by *Political Research Quarterly* can be viewed before their availability in the print issues. We also highlight the **Feminist Theory Reading Group** and their Pre-Conference Workshop and the **Environmental Political Theory Workshop** at this year's WPSA Conference.

As always, we value your feedback as this newsletter further develops. We are currently working with our IT staff to make the newsletter fully web-based which will help with issues of accessibility and make the newsletter more professional. If you have any comments or questions about possible submissions, please contact us at [voregan@fullerton.edu](mailto:voregan@fullerton.edu) or [sstambough@fullerton.edu](mailto:sstambough@fullerton.edu). We also hope to see all of you at the 2011 WPSA Conference in San Antonio, Texas from April 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>. Information about conference participation is available at <http://www.csus.edu/org/wpsa>.

Stephen J. Stambough

Valerie R. O'Regan

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BY LAWRENCE BECKER  
CSU NORTHRIDGE

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## *Western Notes*

*Notes from the Executive Director*

### **2011 WPSA Conference: San Antonio**

San Antonio Mayor Julián Castro and former Mayor Henry Cisneros are among the most prominent names who will be participating in 2011 annual meeting of the WPSA, which will be held at the San Antonio Hyatt Regency Hotel, April 21 – 23. The conference is expected to have more than 1050 participants in some 246 panels. Among the highlights of the conference will be the Pi Sigma Alpha talk by Mayor Castro and an address by APSA President Carole Pateman titled, “Facts and Theories: Reflections from a Political Theorist.” Mayor Castro will also be participating on a roundtable discussion on “The Changing Face of Leadership in the Southwest: San Antonio City Politics in the Future of America.” The roundtable will also include former mayor Cisneros and several leading political scientists. The WPSA Business Meeting will be held on Friday, April 22, followed immediately afterwards by the WPSA reception. More information on these and other events is available on the WPSA website: <http://wpsa.research.pdx.edu/meet/>.



### **Submissions for 2012 WPSA Awards**

Panel chairs and discussants at the upcoming WPSA meeting are encouraged to nominate papers from their panels that they think are worthy of recognition for a WPSA award. Six awards are given out for conference papers: (1) the Pi Sigma Alpha Award for the best paper presented at the annual meeting; (2) the Betty Nesvold Women and Politics Award for the best paper on women and politics; (3) the WPSA Best Paper Award on Latina/Latino Politics; (4) the Award by Committee on the Status of Blacks for an outstanding paper discussing issues and problems that concern most Black Americans; (5) the Charles Redd Award for



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Best Paper on the Politics of the American West (an award offered jointly by the WPSA and the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies of Brigham Young University); and (6) the WPSA Best Paper in Environmental Political Theory Award.

These “best paper” awards carry small cash prizes. More importantly, they are prestigious and can have a very positive impact on careers. So your help in nominating papers is appreciated. Instructions and deadlines for paper submissions and nominations may be found on the WPSA website. The deadlines for most award nominations are set for June 15, 2011.

### ***Portland Hosts 2012 Annual Meeting***

The 2012 meeting of the Association will be held at the Marriott Waterfront in Portland, Oregon, from March 22 to 24. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, University of Utah, is serving as Program Chair for this meeting. Chris Shortell, Portland State University, is the Local Arrangements Chair. The theme of the conference is: “(Re)Imagining Our Future(s): Obama’s Election, Global Crises, and Political Science Practices.” Information regarding the conference, the theme, and the section chairs will soon be posted on the WPSA website: [www.wpsanet.org](http://www.wpsanet.org).

The Association will be meeting at the Renaissance Hotel in Hollywood, California, in 2013 and at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel in 2014.

### ***PRQ OnLine First***

The WPSA is working with SAGE to allow association members to subscribe to *Political Research Quarterly* solely on line. Members will still be able to receive a printed copy if they prefer, but this will allow those who are interested to access the journal just through the internet. Once the details are worked out, members will be given the choice of how they want to receive their subscription. The initiative is being put together to reduce paper use and to cut costs.

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## **Pre-Conference Workshops**

### ***Feminist Theory Reading Group***

The Feminist Theory Reading Group will be holding its annual meeting on April 20th from 2:00 – 6:30. During the first session (2:00-4:30), Kathy Ferguson will lead a discussion of the new edition of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (pp. 3-17, 21-68, 159-213, 439-570, 619-637, 638-664, and 721-766), as well as Toril Moi's negative review of the new translation, published in the *London Review of Books*.

During the second session (5-6:30), Kathi Weeks will join us for a discussion of the introduction and the third chapter of her book-in-progress, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Anti-Work Politics and Post-Work Imaginaries*. Commentary on the book will be offered by Judith Grant. Please contact the session organizers, Lori Marso ([marsol@union.edu](mailto:marsol@union.edu)) and Claire Snyder-Hall ([rcsnyder@gmu.edu](mailto:rcsnyder@gmu.edu)), for copies of the Weeks manuscript or if you have any questions.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICAL THEORY WORKSHOP**

**Wednesday April 20, 2011, 9.00 – 5.00 PM**

**Location: Hyatt Regency at Riverwalk, San Antonio, TX**

The Environmental Political Theory Workshop addresses the intersections between political theory and studies of the environment. The workshop is held annually, one day prior to the Western Political Science Association meetings. It covers a broad range of topics:

- green theories
- environmental relevance of 'traditional' or 'canonical' political theory texts
- environmental justice and activism
- animal rights
- linkages among race, gender, class, and environment
- indigenous perspectives on ecosystems



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- tensions between science and democracy within environmental governance
- analysis of current politics in light of conceptual alternatives (and vice versa)

The workshop also provides an opportunity for networking with scholars sharing your interests, and provides a forum to discuss recent publications, current scholarship, research opportunities, teaching strategies, syllabus development, publishing in environmental political theory, and other news and reflections from theorists working in this field. Younger scholars, including graduate students, are especially welcome.

In the past all workshop participants have sat around a single table for an entire day of open discussion. We expect that this tradition will continue this year. Light refreshments are provided courtesy of the WPSA.

This year's event is especially significant as it will be our tenth annual workshop. In the ten years of the workshop, most participants have found the workshop invaluable in stimulating research and teaching in this exciting field. Please consider joining us in San Antonio this April!



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Seth E. Masket and Hans Noel

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Adrienne R. Smith, Beth Reingold, and Michael Leo Owens

### [The Dynamics of Interest Representation at the U.S. Supreme Court](#)

Thomas Hansford





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### **Meet the Council**



**Melissa R. Michelson** (Ph.D. Yale 1994) is Professor of Political Science at Menlo College. Her research interests include the political mobilization of Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans and youth, and immigrant political incorporation. She is co-author, with Lisa García Bedolla, of the forthcoming book *Mobilizing Inclusion: Redefining Citizenship Through Get-out-the-Vote Campaigns* (Yale University Press). She has published dozens of journal articles and book chapters, including recent work in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, *the Journal of Politics*, and *American Politics Research*.

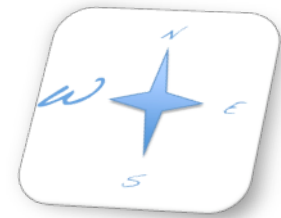
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**Stacy Gordon** is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Reno. She teaches courses on American political institutions, interest groups and political behavior. She is especially interested in the study of how interest groups influence the behavior of legislators at both the federal and state level and has published a book on this topic, *Campaign Contributions and Legislative Voting Behavior: A New Approach*, with Routledge. She is currently working on a project on the development of lobbying strategies in state legislatures. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Politics* and *Comparative Political Studies*.



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## *Western Educator*

### **Wristwatches, Learning, and My Own (Imperfect) Adaptation to Digital Students<sup>1</sup>**

Lawrence Becker  
California State University at Northridge

If you visit my introductory American government course and look carefully, you'll notice that almost none of the students are wearing wristwatches. I wouldn't have noticed but for a point made by Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd in their book, *The Time Paradox*, and in a lecture<sup>2</sup> by Zimbardo that can be found on YouTube. Zimbardo points out that fewer young people<sup>3</sup> – and even fewer of our students – wear wristwatches today because, to them, a wristwatch makes no sense. It is, after all, merely a single-function device (Zimbardo and Boyd 2008, 43). Their smartphone tells them the time, their GPS coordinates, where their colleagues are eating lunch, and allows them to buy movie tickets all while sitting in my class. And yes, it can also be used to calculate a restaurant tip!

So, what does the absence of wristwatches have to do with learning in political science? The decline of wristwatches in our classrooms is symbolic of a profound set of changes happening in the learning environment. Students and instructors are adapting to new technological tools in an incremental way. Email emerges as a new form of

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<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful for insightful comments from Zeynep Toker and Kevin Kvalvik.

<sup>2</sup> The lecture can be found on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3oIiH7BLmg>.

<sup>3</sup> Zimbardo and Boyd reference an article in Newsweek by Jessica Ramirez (2006) that points out that the sale of wristwatches is declining over time.





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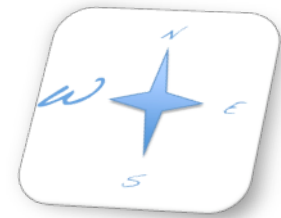
communication and instructors and students use it to communicate more frequently. “Smart” and “wired” and even “wireless” classrooms become the standard and instructors are increasingly delivering content in multimedia format and online rather than just lecturing from a podium with some old, yellowed paper. Online learning management systems like WebCT, Blackboard, and Moodle are adopted by our institutions and we use them to deliver course information and even content to our students. But as we keep our heads down struggling to adapt to and implement each year’s new toy, we miss the more important effect these technologies are having on our learning environment. Having lived their entire lives in a wired world, our students are processing information and are learning in ways that are alien to our own learning experiences. In this essay, I explore the learning challenges our “digital” students face with their “analog” or “digital immigrant” instructors and what, if anything, we can do about it. I argue that, if solutions to this set of problems exist, they require two things of us that most policymakers, institutions, and instructors would seem to lack: a long-term planning horizon and a consistent willingness to adapt to our new realities.

### **What is the problem and how did we get here?**

The typical freshman in my large, introductory American government course was born in the early 1990s, about the time that email, the internet, and mobile phones began to enter the average person’s daily life. They have lived their entire lives immersed in a world where information is always at one’s fingertips, where it is for the most part free and

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perceived to be un-owned, and where the difference between a book, a journal article, a blog, and a tweet is, at best, a matter of font. They are not just “bowling alone,” to use Robert Putnam’s classic metaphor, they are bowling in their homes, or worse, in their cars or on the ski slopes, in a virtual bowling alley. A 2007 study on video game usage among adolescents found that the average gamer spends more than an hour per day playing video games and that means less time for reading whether for leisure or study. A more recent study on the effects of video game usage by young boys found that boys given access to a video game system spent less time on academic activities and performed poorly on reading and writing tasks compared with other boys (Weis and Cerankosky 2010). Video games are just one aspect of the way in which our students live in a world that is both interactive and full of various media streaming at them all the time. A 2010 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that kids between the ages of 8 and 18 spend about 7.5 hours per day using electronic devices like smartphones, computers, and televisions and that increased use of these devices is correlated with poor academic performance (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010). They watch more video, much of it on the internet, they listen to their mp3 players, and they communicate with their friends in real time and they are frequently doing all of these things at once, receiving multiple inputs and feeling bored when they are experiencing just one source of information at a time.

As a result of this, Zimbardo (2010) argues our students’ brains “are being digitally re-wired” in ways that make traditional classroom techniques, like a professor lecturing from a podium in the front of the room, all but incomprehensible to them. Indeed, the



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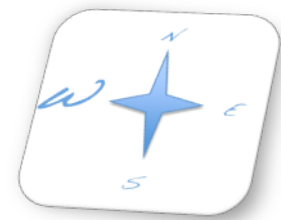
metaphor of “re-wiring” may not simply be a metaphor. There is a great deal of research being done on “neuroplasticity and pruning” (Willis 2008, 426) that suggests our students’ brains are being physically re-structured as particular neural pathways are utilized over time and other neural pathways are allowed to atrophy though, as Willis (2008, 427) points out, “there still is no sturdy bridge between neuroscience and what educators do in the classroom.” Whatever the sturdiness of the bridge, it does seem, to use Howard Gardner’s (1983) more classical formulation, these students have developed a different “frame of mind”<sup>4</sup> than the one that many of us faculty from a previous generation are expecting to help nurture in the classroom setting. Describing this particular disconnect a different way, Marc Prensky (2001) argues that today’s students are “digital natives.” They were born into a digital world so they are not only fluent in working with new technologies, they are able to pick up whatever even newer technology will be created tomorrow seamlessly (Prensky 2001). Reviewing some of the recent literature on information competency among college students in the U.K. and the U.S., Stephen Thornton (2010) argues that, while the complaints about today’s students are frequently over-stated, one of the negative implications of these changes is that these students are able to quickly gather a lot of information about a very wide variety of topics but they are not particularly good at critically evaluating the information they gather and they do not delve deeply into particular research questions. Borrowing from Carr (2008), he says students are “jet skiers” rather than “scuba divers,” and borrowing from Whitworth (2009), he says today’s

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<sup>4</sup> Gardner defines “frames of mind” or separate “human intelligences” as “relatively autonomous human intellectual competencies” (Gardner 1983, 8).

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students suffer from “information obesity” – they are overloaded with information but not enough of it is useful or good for them.

Some might argue that the generational differences in learning styles and the conflict that naturally ensues from this are not new developments. Perhaps, they argue, what we are witnessing is just the contemporary equivalent of students daydreaming and writing notes to one another in class. Berliner and Biddle (1997) argue this tendency, on our part, to criticize the educational habits of young people is at least as old as ancient Greece. They refer to it as the “Socrates Legacy” in reference to Socrates’ criticism of the youth of his day. We, after all, have achieved academic success as students and so they should be more like us. But there would seem to be a critical difference between what we are experiencing today and previous generational shifts. It is not just a shift in the language students use, the way they dress, or the social mores that define the relationship between a student and a faculty member that might have been distracting, disrespectful, or even disruptive in the past. Instead, the change described above represents a tectonic shift in how students gather and process information. The central task with which we are concerned, student learning, happens in a different way now. As Considine, Horton, and Moorman (2009, 471) argue, these students have “a rich and different set of literacy practices and background that is often unacknowledged or underused by educators.”

In short, our students learn differently. They come to us with a very different set of skills and learning problems but we’re not yet sure what to do with it and about it and many instructors, myself included, frequently complain about “these kids today.” Among



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other common complaints, we say that our students lack focus, they don't do much, if any, of the required reading for class, they become too easily bored, and they have difficulty understanding the concept of plagiarism because the notion of words and ideas being "owned" by someone in the digital world is non-sensical to them. They frequently appear to us to be lazy and undisciplined and even to undermine our efforts in the classroom.

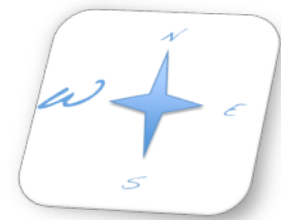
Prensky (2001) argues that, in contrast to this digital generation, who he refers to as "digital natives," those of us in previous generations are "digital immigrants." We learn to use these technologies, sometimes quite well, but it is not natural to us. We have to work harder to learn to use it and we use it with an "accent." Some of us resist new technology in the educational setting and others embrace it. But, even among those of us that embrace it, we frequently use it in an awkward, fumbling kind of way from our students' perspective. On the first day of class last Fall, I elicited an unintentional chuckle from my students by pointing out that they need to turn off their "cellphones and pagers" when they enter class. It is a standard line I am used to using for about 10 years but, to them, an admonition to stop using pagers might as well have been an admonition to stop using their manual typewriters.

### **How we respond**

For many instructors, myself included, there have been two reactions to the rise of the digital generation that are somewhat contradictory and arguably self-defeating. First, in virtually all of my classes, I have banned the use of most electronic devices including

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laptop computers, phones, iPads, iPods, and frankly, whatever device Apple will roll out between now and the end of the semester that every student will purchase and deploy immediately and simultaneously. Laptop computers are far more a distraction than a tool used for learning purposes I tell them. I have watched enough of my colleagues' classes from the back of the room to see that for every minute a student is using their laptop to take notes or look up something class-related, they are using the device for about 10 minutes of instant messaging, web browsing unrelated to the class, updating their Facebook page, or various other forms of personal entertainment. Mobile phones sometimes ring in the middle of class and, every once in a while, a student will even dare to answer the call. In large classes, students will listen to their mp3 player while they are still "half-listening" to class, much the way a professional poker player will listen to loud music while still concentrating intently on the game in front of them. When I see these things happen in front of me, and I am quite sure it happens a lot more than I see, I become angry because from my point of view as a digital immigrant, the actions of the student are disruptive and disrespectful. I ban these devices and I admonish students I catch using them in class. Simply put, all of these devices are, to my sensibility as a digital immigrant, distractions from the core mission of the classroom.

While I stand by that decision – I do continue to ban student use of these devices in all but a few of my classes – my reaction is reminiscent of a story a local Superior Court





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Judge likes to tell<sup>5</sup> about a juror who had fallen asleep during the examination of a witness in a trial. When the attorney examining the witness finally noticed a juror was asleep, he asked the Judge to approach the bench. “Your honor, Juror #6 is asleep,” said the attorney. “So what do you want me to do about it?” asked the Judge. “Wake him up!” was the reply, of course. The Judge thought about it for a moment and replied, “You put him to sleep. You wake him up!” The point is that, while jurors should try not to fall asleep, the attorney in this case has to at least assume some of the responsibility. I need to do more than insist my students learn in precisely the same way and precisely the same classroom setting as I did.

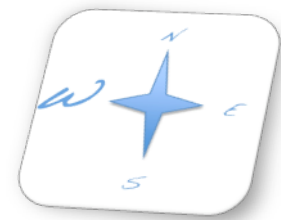
The second reaction, however, has been to employ technology in the classroom. We do so for at least two broad reasons. First, the new economics of higher education require that we do so. Just as in warfare, technology has effectively become a “force multiplier.” Online instruction allows us to reach more students without building more classrooms. Technology allows us to save money on paper, ink, and on the people who used to copy, collate, staple, and distribute paper for us. And technology makes assessment, a critical part of the new economics of higher education, easier to carry out because we can use electronic surveys and tools like clickers and ePortfolios to accumulate data on what students are learning over time in the classroom.

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<sup>5</sup> Importantly, the Judge likes to tell this story to illustrate how the daily grind of the courtroom is not at all like the exciting and dramatic depiction of the courtroom in popular television dramas like *Law and Order*. Like my classroom, courts also ban the use of cell phones, laptop computers, etc., by jurors at least while proceedings are underway. And, like my classroom, attorneys are likely under increasing pressure to capture the attention of “digital natives” in the jury pool, perhaps by becoming more dramatic and flamboyant in their mode of argument and questioning of witnesses.

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A second reason we use technology is to keep students visually engaged, to keep them entertained, and even to introduce a greater degree of interaction in large classes where interaction is difficult to achieve without the technology. I use PowerPoint so students can see, not just hear, the outline of where the class lecture or discussion is headed next. I use video and audio clips to give students something else to see and hear and to break up the class time into what I perceive for them is more manageable chunks. In the past, I have used clickers to introduce some measure of interactivity to the classroom and to conduct on-the-fly assessments of whether students are learning. And, finally, I use a Learning Management System (LMS) to provide students with links to online readings for the course, an easy method of communication with me and with other students in the class, immediate access to their grades, and to host a variety of online exercises and quizzes related to the class.

## **Why my response fails more often than not**

A colleague of mine and I sometimes complain that at least some of our collective pedagogical response to the rise of the digital generation has created a new form of pedagogy we refer to as “edu-tainment.” Particularly in the large introductory classes, where the use of technology and multimedia is more prevalent, our instruction begins to feel a bit more like performance and, more importantly, we begin to make the mistake of equating learning with positive student reaction to the performance. When a class is particularly quiet on a given day, we feel as if we are comedians who just really “bombed”



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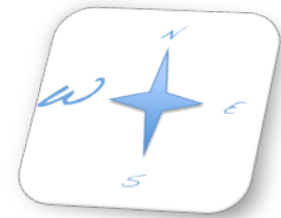
on stage. We try to figure how we can re-work the various “bits” in ways that would be more pleasing to the audience. Performance is a concept that is not wholly unrelated to the learning process but it is surely a task for us, as political scientists, that is far afield from our training. To put it another way, if student learning is somehow substantially connected to the sense of comedic timing of political scientists, we are in deeper trouble than I had ever imagined.

A larger problem is that most political scientists (and most academics generally) have little or no training in pedagogy at all, much less training in understanding the new learning styles of digital natives. Instead, virtually all of the training of college instructors is focused on the substantive content of their discipline. As Halpern and Hakel (2003) point out, this applies even to faculty whose research focuses on the field of education. They argue, “We have found precious little evidence that content experts in the learning sciences actually apply the principles they teach in their own classrooms. Like virtually all college faculty, they teach the way they were taught” (Halpern and Hakel 2003, 37).

That is not to say we know nothing about pedagogy. We learn about pedagogy from our own experiences as students and from trial and error in our classrooms over time. We know something about what inspired us to learn and we know what helped us to learn. We also have a sense of whether our students are learning even outside of formal methods of assessment. Furthermore, most political scientists I know care intensely about teaching and learning and spend a great deal of time working to improve student-learning outcomes.

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But we are less successful than we might otherwise be for two reasons. First, we mistakenly assume our students are like us. Most of our students are less inspired by the substance of political science than we were. Many or most of them are interested in politics, government, and public policy but this is not quite political science. The distinction is important. We learned as graduate students, perhaps even as undergraduates in our case, about important disciplinary questions and disputes. We conduct research on these same questions. So we were inspired by these disciplinary questions as students, we were trained to answer them, and we spend much of our professional lives working on these questions. We are content experts and we frequently speak in our own language as a discipline. Student learning is hindered by our inability to translate these concepts into the language our students understand. Not only do we use alien language, we use dated examples. George H.W. Bush might as well be Chester Arthur to our students. They are figures they've read about in textbooks or, more likely, Wikipedia, not contemporary illustrations of a concept. More importantly, because they are digital natives, they are processing information in different ways. They are wired differently so they learn differently. As I described above, I seek to speak their language by employing technology in the classroom in a variety of ways. At my best, I speak their language with an accent. I use PowerPoint to enhance visual learning but I probably do not organize slides as my students would – too much text, not enough music by Eminem! I create a course Moodle site and upload resources to it but I do not organize these resources in a visually stimulating way. Part of the reason for this is my time is limited and I'm not a



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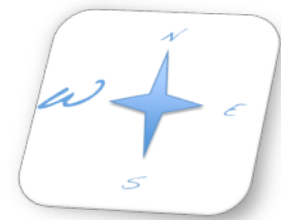
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creative artist. But it is also that I just don't intuitively think this use of my time is pedagogically useful. My intuition is wrong.

A second reason we are less successful than we otherwise might be is the several ways in which pedagogical strategies are too focused on the short term. Halpern and Hakel (2003, 38) argue that "the first and only goal" of instruction in higher education is "long-term retention and transfer," meaning we want our students to be able to recall the knowledge, skills, and competencies we have helped them learn later on and, more importantly, we want them to be able to "transfer" those skills and competencies to some context beyond school at some time in the future. The problem is that "Teaching for retention during a single academic term to prepare students for an assessment that will be given to them in the same context in which the learning occurs is very different from teaching for long-term retention and transfer" (Halpern and Hakel 2003, 38). So how do we do this? Halpern and Hakel (2003, 38-39) make a number of recommendations including requiring students to "generate responses, with minimal cues, repeatedly over time with varied applications," "varying the conditions under which learning takes place," and requiring learners to "take information that is presented in one format and 're-represent it in an alternative format.'" Doing these things requires long-term pedagogical AND institutional commitment. Even faculty who care deeply about student learning and about preparing students for their future make pedagogical choices in an environment biased towards short-term and incrementalist answers. In my large, introductory courses, I offer my students online, multiple-choice exams for a variety of reasons including the

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need to save money on paper and printing and my need to balance my time grading between this course and other courses I offer. These online exams meet our Department's short-term needs but, by the standard Halpern and Hakel lay out, they do not meet the long-term needs of our students.

We also focus on the short term in our deployment of technology. Universities consistently feel pressure to employ the latest and greatest instructional technology both because students and faculty want to try out new toys and because all universities want to be on the cutting edge. We also employ technology to try to speak the language of the digital natives. I employ technology in the classroom in a variety of ways described above. Among other things, some colleagues of mine and I have spent an immeasurable amount of time capturing, editing, and cataloguing video and audio clips for instructional purposes. Some of these clips are from documentaries and others are clips from popular movies and television shows that help us to make some point about politics, policy, and government in a way that is more accessible to our students. This takes a tremendous amount of time and it is a constant work in progress as some of these clips become dated rather quickly. Somehow I think that clip from "Bonanza" won't quite work anymore! Our institution recently began to use Moodle and, not long after, I heard rumblings that a different web-based platform is under consideration for next year. I would tell you what it is but I've only heard it discussed and haven't seen it spelled so I don't want to put the umlaut or the tilde in the wrong place. The point is we live in the short-term on technology and, too often, we let the technology drive the pedagogy rather than the other way around.





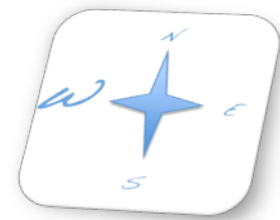
## **What we need to do**

So what do we do about all this? The short answer is that there is no short answer. There is certainly no short-term quick-fix. I would argue the longer answer is two-fold. Institutionally, we need to have a longer-term planning horizon and we need to give greater thought to the linkages between our institutional procedures, including personnel procedures, and student learning in this new environment. For instance, many of our efforts at assessment currently focus on near-term assessment of short-term retention of information. Instead, we need to think about longer-term assessment of what skills and competencies students are getting out of programs or at least parts of programs and having students demonstrate those competencies in a variety of settings and formats. We need a longer-term planning horizon on technology. That means avoiding the urge to jump on the bandwagon of every technological “advance” that is marketed to us and to our students. We don’t have the resources to have them all and, more importantly, the digital generation doesn’t have the patience for an experiment gone wrong.

On the more micro-level of the individual faculty member, we need to understand that the new learning styles of our students require consistent adaptation in a wider variety of areas. Just as we have to consistently adapt to disciplinary changes in our field, we have to also adapt to varied and changing learning styles, rapidly changing technology, and even to changes in pop culture. And we have to integrate all of that together. There is good news and bad news to be found in the new learning styles of our students. They

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require more visually and audiologically-enhanced learning environments and they have shorter attention spans. On the upside, they are more competent with various information technologies and they are arguably more communicative with their instructors, even if that communication takes a different form – like email that is written like a text message, LOL – than we are used to. But how do these vague prescriptions work in practice?

**Consistent Adaptation in the Classroom:** Within our own classes<sup>6</sup>, in every stage of pedagogy, we need to think about who our learners are. Courses need to be designed with “long-term retention and transfer” (Halpern and Hakel 2003) in mind and that means requiring students to apply what they are learning multiple times in different settings and modes over the course of the semester. Courses should focus more on depth of learning rather than breadth. It is better to cover less but to cover it deeply (Halpern and Hakel 2003, 41). Exams, papers, and other multimedia assignments should be designed in such a way that we are assessing whether students have developed the longer-term knowledge and competencies we want them to learn rather than short-term memorization. Individual classes need to employ multimedia both to keep students’ attention and also to deliver the same educational content across multiple different platforms to reach different learners within the same classroom. Slides in PowerPoint need to be brief and they are more effective if they include images, video, and/or audio. Relating the content to contemporary examples, including references from pop culture is helpful. Pryor (2008, 396) points out

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<sup>6</sup> As I’ve described the trends in higher education above, what constitutes being “in the classroom” is changing as rapidly as anything else. Sitting at home working on one’s Moodle page or even giving a live lecture from home via Elluminate is as much “in the classroom” as the brick-and-mortar classroom. To put it another way, we can do a lot “in the classroom” without actually being in the classroom.

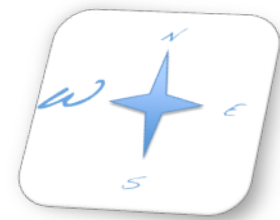


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that in his introductory biology classes, the use of pop culture references helps because students are “fascinated with the application of biology to their everyday lives.” But it is more than an issue of fascination. It is about meeting students where they live. In post-course evaluations, 97% of Pryor’s students “found the examples helpful in learning and remembering the material whereas 92% of his students did not find the textbook “helpful or interesting” (Pryor 2008, 398). As mentioned above, in my classes, I use video clips from pop culture frequently. I use clips from the movie *Office Space* to illustrate important concepts on bureaucratic dysfunction, I use clips from the *Daily Show* to illustrate important concepts about media and politics, and I use the depiction of Moses bringing the 10 commandments down from Mt. Sinai from Mel Brooks’s *History of the World* to spark a discussion of differing forms of government and where laws come from. To engage this digital generation of students and to encourage learning and long-term retention and transfer, multimedia and pop culture references are tools to be utilized, not distractions to be entirely shut out of the classroom.

Much of this may be obvious. But it is surprising how few of us do all these things in practice. I don’t do all of these things in practice all the time. Sometimes there are good institutional reasons why, and I address some of these in a moment, but it is also the case that it is easy to slip back into what seems most familiar. “I learned this way so my students can as well.” Our students are different than us. Your experience, in this case, is probably not as faithful a guide as you think.



**Longer-Term Planning Horizons:** One of the more important reasons faculty do not follow some of the prescriptions here is that there are strong institutional incentives to do what they are currently doing. Many instructors serve institutions that do not take instruction seriously within the retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) process. Even where quality instruction is valued in the RTP process, student evaluations of instruction that are designed poorly, focusing on factors unrelated to or even at odds with long-term learning, may play an important role in the RTP process. Institutional service may not be given appropriate recognition in the RTP process, yet service on these committees by instructors who understand these issues is critical. Particularly in the current budget environment, institutions may not set money aside to provide incentives for instructors to devote time to learning the language of the digital natives and for improving their pedagogical toolkit generally. Classroom technology may not be a budgetary priority. Assessment efforts at some institutions may focus on short-term learning in order to demonstrate success NOW rather than the longer-term learning outcomes we actually hope students can achieve. Curricular debates become proxy resource wars rather than the useful discussions about the needs of the digital generation that they could be. Faculty, particularly faculty that understand the pedagogical challenges outlined here, need to be more engaged in these institutional decisions. RTP processes, curricular debates, and even discussions of budgets and institutional planning, a domain that is often reserved for administrators, may impact what happens in your classroom more than the things like the course syllabus and readings that are more directly under your control. Decisions are



made by those who show up and those who show up right now may not be serving your students well.

## **Back to wristwatches**

Unlike my students, I wear a wristwatch to class every day even if I'm not sure why. As class is underway and my mind is spinning with a million thoughts about what I'm doing, whether students are learning, where we're headed next, etc., every so often, I need to know what time it is and how much time I have left. Usually, I look at the electronic clock on the podium, a clock on the wall, or I'll look at the screen in the front of the class where the time might be displayed on the lower right corner. One recent day at the beginning of the semester, I looked down at my watch to find the time and noticed that my watch had stopped. After an awkward pause, I looked up at the clock in the room and proceeded. The metaphorical, not to mention metaphysical, meaning of the moment wasn't immediately apparent to me. After class, a student approached me to ask if she could have a permission number to add my class. I told her I had checked online just before class and there were no spaces available. Practically before I could finish my sentence, she had her iPhone out, had opened a browser, had logged onto the University web portal, and was able to show me that, in fact, there were two spaces available. I don't know it for a fact but I suspect two students dropped after watching me check the time on my watch during class. "Just another uni-functional instructor," one probably muttered to the other.

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Perhaps it didn't all happen that way. But students pick up on these things, especially these kinds of things, more often than you might think. Perhaps they dropped the course because they found another course that fit their schedule better. Perhaps they dropped the course because it was too much reading or they don't like my hairstyle or something else. It wouldn't have really mattered much to me if I hadn't noticed later on when I checked my "paper/analog" attendance sheet that the two students who dropped the course had been in class that day. That means they had managed to drop the course either while sitting in my class or in the exact minute before this other student asked to add. In that moment of realization, I wondered how, technically how, they were able to drop the class either so quickly after class or without my seeing them using their smartphone or laptop in class. The digital generation, it turns out, is more creative, more competent, and more intelligent than we sometimes imagine them to be. After all, who is the sucker wearing a \$100 single-function device around his wrist that just stopped working?

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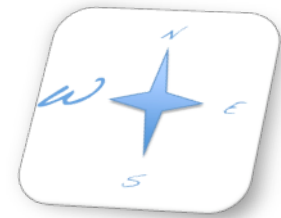
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## Submission Instructions

At *The Western* we encourage submissions for articles in any of our four areas: *Western Educator*, *Western Researcher*, *Western Politics*, and *Western Reviews*.

### ***Western Educator***

For the *Western Educator* we welcome submissions about controversies and innovations in political science education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. These can be articles that describe unique classroom simulations, the incorporation of innovative technology into the classroom, and a wide variety of other topics. We especially welcome submissions with a focus on topics unique to the western region. Articles should be no more than 10 pages.

### ***Western Researcher***

For the *Western Researcher* we welcome submissions that present innovative research techniques, data sources, and reviews of current trends. We especially welcome those with a focus on the western region. Articles should be no more than 10 pages.

### ***Western Politics***

For the *Western Politics* section we welcome individual papers and organized symposia about topical issues of political events in the western United States, Canada, and Mexico. Individual papers should be no longer than 10 pages. If you are interested about proposing and editing a symposium, please contact the editors.

### ***Western Reviews***

Please contact the editors if you are interested in reviewing books.