

Prepare Students for Political and Nonpartisan Discussion

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It can be uncomfortable to discuss politics in a classroom. Political discussions can put people on edge, evoke emotional responses, or short-circuit the critical thinking part of one's brain. But political topics can creep into a classroom on any topic in many ways. Whether students are discussing a topic before class begins in a way that leaves a lasting effect on the classroom environment, or an instructor raises a seemingly innocuous issue that takes an awkward turn in a classroom discussion, politics is pervasive. So how do we handle it in the classroom?

As a professor of politics, it is critical for me to remain politically neutral in the classroom. Unfortunately, in the last few years, this priority has become more challenging. (I've written publicly about this for Vox.) In addition, **I want to teach students to engage politics with curiosity, rather than with emotion.** So, for instance, I provide the following information in my syllabi about how to acquire and consume news curiously and dispassionately, like a political scientist:

News, Media, and Consumption of Political Information

As a part of this course, it is your responsibility to be well-informed about current events and political news. We will discuss it each day in class, use political science theories to explain why things happen, and learn to consume news in a responsible way. Each class begins with a 15-minute discussion of "What's happening in politics?" in which students are expected to raise questions and demonstrate basic knowledge of current events. It is increasingly difficult to learn about political events in a way that is even-handed and non-partisan. Here are some tips about how to consume news in a way that will provide you with the most value:

1. Consume a variety of well-respected news sources. In general, for national political news, I recommend *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Politico*, *Vox.com*, and National Public Radio. Instructions for accessing subscription service through Mason are below.
2. Avoid television news altogether, except on election night.
3. Avoid getting your news exclusively from social media.
4. Avoid news sources that seek to provoke an emotional response. Try to consume news dispassionately. It's okay to have passion about politics, rights, justice, issues, etc. But try to consume news with a sense of curiosity, rather than an urge to be outraged, touched, or emotive in any sense. Train yourself to read a headline and respond with, "Huh, that's interesting," rather than automatically clicking forward, like, or retweet.



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