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Integrating Gender into the Political Science Core Curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

The New Research on Gender in Political Psychology Conference¹ brought together new and experienced teachers with interests in gender politics. The conference session “Teaching Gender throughout the Curriculum” generated a great deal of discussion concerning the pedagogical practice of gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming—the integration of gendered content into courses required for a major—was recognized as one of 11 recommendations for reforming the undergraduate political science curriculum in the 1991 APSA report “Liberal Learning and The Political Science Major: A Report to the Profession” (popularly referred to as the Wahlke Report). Little information is available on the prevalence of gender courses in the undergraduate curriculum, but the data that does exist suggest such courses are uncommon (Brandes et al. 2001). We found virtually no data on the practice of gender mainstreaming in political science and little data in the way of assessing the impact of gendered content when students are exposed to it. This absence of data suggests gender mainstreaming has not emerged as a serious priority for curricular reform.

We suspect mainstreaming is hindered by a combination of factors—primarily a lack of training in gender politics and perhaps the absence of practical guidelines available to instructors. As scholars with experience both teaching stand-alone gender courses and integrating gender content into non-elective courses, the conference attendees are uniquely situated to offer practical guidelines for instructors who are interested in pursuing gender mainstreaming in their core political science courses. In this article, we discuss the rationale for mainstreaming and provide examples of ways in which we have successfully integrated gender into courses that are not explicitly about gender. We hope these examples illustrate how mainstreaming can be easily accomplished in a variety of different core political science courses.

WHY MAINSTREAM?

The Wahlke Report’s recommendation for integrating gender into the political science curriculum was part of a larger call for transitioning to a diversity curriculum, to be accomplished via mainstreaming. Specifically:

That the character and implications of *ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity and the international and transnational dimensions* of particular problems and policies be *addressed in all relevant courses*—“mainstreamed” in the pedagogical vernacular—not treated as a separate and unique problem to be dealt with in a

particular course or two or by a particular faculty member (Wahlke, 1991, 53, emphasis in original).

Mainstreaming centrally locates gender (and other diversity subjects) rather than peripherally within the discipline. Stand-alone courses provide important opportunities for students to pursue their interests in gender politics. Relegating all gender politics content to a special elective reinforces that idea that gender politics is separate from or tangential to the mainstream study of politics. Furthermore, teaching diversity topics only in special elective courses makes it relatively easy for majors to self-select out of any exposure to gender politics, which undermines the primary objectives of a diversity curriculum (Sevelius and Stake 2003).

The 2011 report from the APSA Taskforce on Political Science in the 21st Century recently reiterated this point, highlighting “the need for richer, more comprehensive, and systematic data regarding research, teaching, and pedagogy, and access and inclusion within the profession (5).” Along this vein, the committee strongly promoted efforts to develop “new research, teaching, and career development paradigms that can serve as models for departments of political science, universities, and colleges to embrace the rich intellectual opportunities presented in the study and teaching of issues related to diversity and inclusion (5).

Gender as an Analytic Construct

Although general arguments for a diverse and inclusive curriculum are relatively uncontroversial and well known (e.g., Kowalski 2000), rationales for gender mainstreaming extend beyond the benefits of exposure to diverse perspectives. That is, there are merits to the inclusion of gender that are specific to the study of gender itself. There is great value afforded by the conceptualization of gender as an analytic construct, rather than a descriptive category. Gender is often invoked in a superficially descriptive sense, in a way that pits men against women. This “battle of the sexes” approach highlights and essentializes differences between women and men (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988; 1990; Stewart and McDermott 2004). It focuses on the average differences between men and women while ignoring the many commonalities between women and men. This approach also obscures important sources of heterogeneity among women (e.g., Crenshaw 1991). Understanding diversity among women—particularly based on race and ethnicity—has become increasingly relevant given demographic trends in student enrollment (APSA 2011).

Thinking about gender as an analytic construct rather than a descriptive category clarifies its importance within the curriculum. Gender draws attention to the relationship between individuals and institutions. Indeed, Beckwith (2005) identifies this as one of the most significant contributions of the study of women and politics—it challenges “conventional, institution-focused, state-centric definitions of politics” (129). Gender is closely linked to key organizing themes in political science such as power, choice, and inequality. It is not simply a matter of “where the women are”—where women are visible (Silverberg 1994). Gender often shows through in meaningful ways when ostensibly gender-neutral institutional arrangements and policies are found to impact men and women differently. First, consider, for example, the effect of electoral rules on the electoral fortunes of female candidates. Women candidates are much more likely to run and to be elected in multimember districts. Darcy, Welch, and Clark (1994) investigated this relationship in state legislatures throughout the United States and found the proportion of women winning seats in multimember districts was double that of single-member districts (see also Schwindt-Bayer and Mischler 2005). A second seemingly gender-neutral institutional arrangement that dis-

In contrast to narrow understandings of gender as cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity, gender as an analytic category functions as a heuristic device that illuminates areas for inquiry, frames questions for investigation, identifies puzzles in need of exploration, and provides concepts, definitions, and hypotheses to guide research (Hawkesworth 2005, 144).

In psychology, recent work employing intersectionality² has been used as an analytic construct to draw attention to the ways multiple group memberships—including gender—affect lived experiences (e.g., Cole 2009; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis 2010).

Given its value as an analytic construct, gender mainstreaming addresses not only the diversity goals of the Wahlke Report (1991), but also the report’s recommendation for more rigorous methodological training. Although this recommendation has received perhaps the most attention from the discipline, efforts to promote methodological rigor have disproportionately emphasized developing students’ quantitative skills. The methodological pluralism, which the panel advocates, extends beyond quantitative literacy to include normative and analytic inquiry. As an analytic category, gender can be applied to

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advantages women involves unregulated terms of office in legislative positions. The overwhelming majority of incumbents are men, and the incumbency advantage, coupled with unregulated terms in office, perpetuates a gender imbalance in legislative positions (Swers 2001). When women overcome the hurdles of American electoral institutions, they can encounter further institutional discrimination when holding office. Hawkesworth (2003), for example, documents how institutional dynamics in Congress—topic, legislative topic extinction and “pendejo” games—subverts congresswomen of color.

Gender also has a place in understanding and analyzing social problems such as the feminization of poverty, homelessness, and economic development, as well as the policies designed to alleviate them, such as family cap based welfare reform (e.g., Camasso 2007; Richards et al. 2010; Kabeer 2004). Gender also shows through in the operational definition of key concepts within political science research. Although what constitutes mass political behavior seems relatively straightforward, participation often has been defined in a way that maximizes perceptions of gender difference in political activity. By emphasizing formal and conventional forms of participation, the literature tends to overlook women’s involvement in more ad-hoc voluntary organizations and protest movements (Carroll 1989; Collins 1991; Norris 1991).

For Hawkesworth (2005), the study of gender has both substantive and methodological implications. She lays out these methodological advantages clearly in her essay on “engendering” the discipline:

virtually any political subject and offers a viable framework for structuring inquiry. Thus, the use of gender as an analytic category furthers the panel’s goal of maximizing the methodological competence of political science majors.

Recruiting and Retaining Women in the Major

A second argument for gender mainstreaming concerns the recruitment, retention, and socialization of female political science majors. The 2010 American Political Science Association’s Survey of Department Chairs indicates that women currently constitute about 40% of majors. Although women seem somewhat less likely than men to major in political science at the undergraduate level, they are significantly less likely to pursue graduate studies in the field (Nerad 2004). These two factors undoubtedly contribute to the dearth of female faculty members and rather limited growth in the number of women in the profession over the past 20 years (Brandes et al. 2001). In turn, the lack of female faculty members translates to a lack of female role models and mentors for female majors who would consider pursuing graduate studies. It may also result in fewer elective course offerings in gender politics and less coverage of gender-relevant material across all course offerings.

Consistent with this notion, an APSA Workshop Report on Women’s Advancement in Political Science suggests that women may not “find themselves” in political science courses (APSA 2005). The emphasis on male leadership and power in the mainstream curriculum belies the political relevance of gender. The absence of explicit references to women and

gender politics implicitly signals to students its lack of importance or centrality to the study of political life and political processes. This notion—the absence of certain content is as relevant as the inclusion of particular content—is captured in the concept of the “hidden curriculum” (Jackson 1968). In political science, the hidden curriculum reinforces stereotypes about gender, status, and power. It bolsters the association between men and agentic leadership traits and between women and more communal, submissive traits, all of which directly bears on attitudes toward political leadership (Eagly and Carli 2007). Furthermore, it fails to situate female majors within their own field of study, instead sending a powerful implicit signal about minority status within the discipline—a signal reinforced by the absence of female faculty (see Settles et al. 2006)

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Mainstreaming involves a concerted effort to address such curricular flaws by explicitly discussing the missing content and actively incorporating new content to shed light on these topics and their omission. It has been promoted as a means of producing more diversity at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The American Sociological Association (ASA) has adopted mainstreaming, in conjunction with a more active commitment to mentoring, to increase diversity among students and faculty within the field. This approach has met with apparent success, evidenced by an increase in the number of women at all levels (APSA 2005).

Little data exist to assess the effect of mainstreaming on student engagement or attitudes in sociology or other fields (Wyer et al. 2007). However, in a recent study, Rios, Stewart, and Winter (2010) found that deliberately incorporating examples of women leaders into a political psychology course resulted in women students writing more about women and leadership on final exams. In addition, women exposed to a gender-inclusive curriculum wrote more about the positive influence women leaders had on their own identities and future career choices as leaders than did women exposed to a traditional, male-centered curriculum. Although further evaluation of gender mainstreaming is needed, particularly within political science, this preliminary evidence suggests its potential not only to accomplish diversity objectives but to enrich the educational experience of female majors.

MAINSTREAMING STRATEGIES

When gender is included in the curriculum, the most common strategy is for instructors to integrate a “week on gender” in to their courses. Although this is a good start, we see several limitations to this approach because it is divorced from

the idea of gender mainstreaming. Segregating gender content from other course content separates it from the main body of political science coursework. It treats gender as a descriptive category and eschews gender as an important analytic construct that is directly applicable to the main themes, concepts, and lessons in the course.

Rather than including a week-long or single session on gender, we propose that gender be infused throughout the curricula. To that end, we share several examples, which are mostly exercises we have used successfully in our own courses. We focus on group exercises or assignments related to gender as opposed to merely content whereby one might, for example, include gender readings on a syllabus or include gender examples in lectures. Our goal is to provide more concrete guidelines for how to creatively use gender as an ana-

lytic framework for understanding key political issues and concepts. We focus on exercises that engage and promote active dialogue among students rather than relying solely on a more passive transmission of information from instructor to student. We hope this approach helps instructors overcome concerns about lack of training or experience with gender politics and also provides memorable learning experiences for students. When possible, we supplement our descriptions of exercises and assignments with recommended readings. Many of these materials provide opportunities to investigate the intersection between gender and race, provide a better understanding of heterogeneity among women, and avoid an essentialist approach. In the text we provide a short overview of various mainstreaming alternatives, but the online appendix offers more guidelines for certain examples.³ Also note that these exercises have been developed for use in US politics courses, but we hope that instructors in other subfields will also develop similar ideas for mainstreaming.

Descriptive Representation

Several conference participants noted that they introduced gender in relation to descriptive representation across courses in the curriculum (e.g., public opinion, introduction to US politics, and US Congress, in addition to women and politics courses). An interactive lecture and small group activity helped students critically examine whether women require descriptive representation in politics. The instructor listed several groups on the board (e.g., redheads, farmers, gay men, Latinas, white women) and asked students to work in small groups to generate ideas about which groups *most* and *least* need political representation. Then, as part of a group discussion, students evaluated group needs for political representation based on criteria laid out in Sapiro’s (1981) essay “When Are

Interests Interesting? The Problem of Political Representation of Women.” The article lays out four specific criteria that indicate a group requires political representation; (1) possession of unique, politically relevant characteristics; (2) special interests; (3) sharing particular social, economic, or political problems; and (4) sharing distinct viewpoints or preferences regarding appropriate solutions to shared problems.

Privilege and Subordination

In a large lecture course, one participant assigned Peggy McIntosh’s (2004) short article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” to orient students to discuss dominant and subordinate group memberships, group status, prejudice, and dominant group privilege (further information is available in the online appendix). Completing this exercise allowed students to recognize that everyone is privileged in some ways and disadvantaged in others. It also reduced resistance to discussing politically charged topics, such as inequality.

Current Controversies and Group Status

In a large lecture course, one participant addressed current controversies regarding group statuses by having students work in groups throughout the semester. Students were asked to identify and research political controversies regarding relative group status (e.g., Are women less politically involved than men? Are candidates of color represented differently in the media than white candidates?). In their papers and presentations, students included two conflicting positions, related arguments, and supporting evidence. At the end of the semester, students creatively presented their controversy and led the class in discussion. Each student also individually completed a final paper expanding on their group’s work. Inevitably, students discovered that the answers to their initial questions were complicated and dependent on the initial assumptions made about, for example, what constitutes political participation.

Political Biography and Case Study Assignments

One successful assignment discussed by a conference participant could be adapted to a broad range of political science courses, including Congress, the courts, leadership, political psychology, political activism, and parties and elections. One instructor asked students in a psychology of political activism seminar to complete a case study of a female political activist. Students applied theories covered in the course to understand why the woman became a political activist. Another instructor required students in a gender course to select a biography of a political woman (e.g., Albright 2003; Boxer 1993; Man-killer and Wallis 1999; Schroeder 1998). Students read, presented, and wrote a final paper that applied the course themes to understand the particular woman’s experience. Biography assignments like these could work well in many types of political science courses. The political actors need not be exclusively female, but identifying female alternatives makes female political actors salient and provides options for students who wish to explore the lives of women further. In many courses, including research methods, instructors might also add an

experiential element to this assignment by having students interview female political actors (see Rosenthal 1999 for a discussion of undergraduate field research on gender).

Research Methods

One participant uses gender as a central aspect to teaching research methods. After teaching students about questionnaire design, she asks students to construct a series of survey questions related to political ambition. Then, students collect data from their male and female college peers as well as adults in the community. In class, they work together to assess potential generational shifts in the gender gap in political ambition. In another example, students conduct an experiment on stereotype threat and its effect on women’s political knowledge (e.g., see McGlone, Aronson, and Kobrynowicz 2006). Several other political science examples can be easily imagined, including having students experimentally test the “double bind” whereby women in leadership positions are punished for their violation of the female-typical roles (e.g., see Hall Jamieson 1995). Instructors could ask students to conduct a content analysis of candidate campaign commercials or direct mail pieces for gendered communication. Of course, these exercises need not be used only in research methods courses; the last example could be used in a campaigns and elections course or in a media and politics course.

Another instructor integrates gender into a research methods course exercise on focus groups. The main goal of the exercise is to learn how to conduct focus groups and analyze the data obtained via this method. The objective for the student focus group organizers is to determine whether the participants think about politics in ideological terms and to gauge their level of political sophistication. The three focus groups vary in their gender composition such that they were composed of all male students, all female students, and a mix of male and female students. After reviewing the substantive responses of the group members, the students discuss how the gender of the participants influenced the kinds of answers they provided. In addition, the students analyze the ways in which the gender balance of the groups affected their dynamics. This discussion is linked to previous weeks’ lessons on large-n surveys and interviewer effects. Although not the focal point of the exercise, the inclusion of gender as a potential confound creates a highly visible avenue for students to assess the kinds of factors that might affect the validity of data obtained this way, as well as the role of gender in political thinking and deliberation in general.

Gender, Intersectionality, and Leadership

In a political psychology course, one participant assigns readings that specifically deal with gender, multiple group memberships, and leadership. To incorporate women, the instructor uses case studies of women leaders. The December 2010 issue of *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, for instance, provides interesting analysis of Hillary Clinton’s presidential bid (e.g., Falk and Kenski 2006; Heflick and Goldenberg 2009). In addition, several participants use Deborah Traister’s (2010) *Big Girls Don’t Cry: The Election that Changed Everything for*

American Women to discuss the role of identity, identity appeals, the media, and intersectionality in the 2008 primary and general elections. This book could be used in courses on race and/or gender and also in courses on public opinion, campaigns and elections, media and politics, or an introduction to US politics course. Generally, many mainstream political science topics can be illustrated with examples from women's lives (e.g., when teaching about generations, use a case study of Vera Britain, a nineteenth-century feminist pacifist activist).

Gender-Related Applied Homeworks

One participant uses gender-related applied homeworks across her campaigns and elections, political psychology, and media and politics courses. The assignments ask students to apply what they have read to their own political analysis. For example, students read a selection of Kira Sanbonmatsu's (2002) *Democrats, Republicans, and the Politics of Women's Place*, which examines whether, how, and in what ways the major political parties have responded to the changing roles of women and gender issues such as reproductive rights. Students then examine the major political party websites for evidence of party strategies with regard to gender. In a media and politics course, students analyze male and female candidates' websites and campaign ads for evidence of gender stereotypes, as well as gender bending (Schneider forthcoming).

Strategic Communication Plan and TV Spot

One participant utilizes an interesting assignment that asks students in a media and politics course to create a comprehensive communication plan for a political candidate of their choice and then create one 30-second television advertisement for the candidate. Each group gives rationales for various aspects of their plans, including how their plans reflect gender-specific strategies.

Gender Gap Exercise

In her public opinion course, one participant asks students to work in small groups to estimate the direction and magnitude of the gender gap across a list of political issues. Through a guided discussion interspersed with group work, students are introduced to concepts like essentialism and intersectionality, as well as theories of gender difference in public opinion and their relationship to stereotypes about women. The exercise not only introduces essential concepts, but also challenges students' conceptions of gender differences and introduces them to data to which they can compare their perceptions.

To achieve a similar goal, another participant successfully uses a human public opinion poll in a 300-level public opinion course with approximately 45 students. Prior to class, students read Norris' (2003) gender gap piece "The Gender Gap: Old Challenges, New Approaches." In class, women and men come to the front of the room. For each item on a list the instructor reads, on a range of issues like war, the death penalty, and abortion, students move to the right if they support the issue and left if they oppose (full list of items in online

appendix). For each item, students are asked to see if they observe a gender gap. Afterward, the class discusses where gender gap emerged, whether they personally contributed to these gaps, and how their observations related to Norris' (2003) analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

In our discussions with participants at the New Research on Gender in Political Psychology Conference, we discovered many practical and exciting ways to infuse gender throughout a mainstream political science curriculum. We compiled many of these exercises in this article to help other instructors of political science courses more fully address gender in conjunction with other group memberships, across a wide range of courses.

The field as a whole has recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming in political science. Beginning with the Wahlke Report, and continuing with more contemporary studies (Kowalski 2000; Rios et al. 2010), researchers have documented how gender inclusiveness not only makes better science, but also how inclusiveness (or lack thereof) has real and long-term effects on the representation of women in politics and political science departments. For these reasons, faculty should consider mainstreaming.

Political science departments can also play an important role in promoting mainstreaming. We encourage departments to assess mainstreaming in their current curricula and brainstorm ways to encourage additional efforts. As part of this approach, departments should consider the gender balance among their majors and strategies to best address the special needs of their female majors. Mainstreaming, along with other creative efforts, can not only provide women political science majors with more opportunities to study gender but also increase their engagement with the major and their desire to pursue graduate studies in the field.

More broadly, our discipline would benefit from increased scholarly attention to mainstreaming. We hope that faculty who adopt some of the strategies we present will work to assess their efforts and disseminate their findings. By evaluating mainstreaming efforts, we can better understand their effectiveness and the magnitude of their impact on undergraduate majors. Furthermore, the discipline would benefit from research and evaluation regarding the prevalence of gender classes and the experiences of female majors. This information would provide important tools for developing and maintaining the pipeline for women in the discipline. ■

NOTES

1. The conference was held at Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics in March of 2011. Details about the conference are available at <http://genderandpolipsych.com>. The conference was organized by Angela L. Bos (College of Wooster) and Monica C. Schneider (Miami University of Ohio) and funded by the National Science Foundation.
2. Intersectionality describes "analytic approaches that simultaneously consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage." (Cole 2009, 170) More simply, it is the recognition that all people belong to multiple groups and that group memberships intersect in ways that have real effects on daily life.

3. Selected exercises are explored in more detail the online appendix at <http://genderandpolipsych.com/news/online-appendix-integrating-gender-into-the-political-science-core-curriculum>. This resource is a work in progress and additional items will be developed and posted in the future.

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APSA Publications

Careers and the Study of Political Science



Career

Careers and the Study of Political Science (2003, revised 6th ed.). Comprehensive career guide.

Video: Career Encounters: Political Science (2002 DVD). A short video exploring careers in political science.

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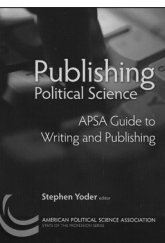
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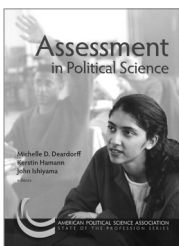
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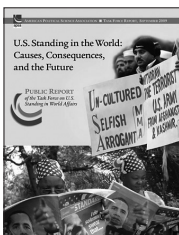
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