Rebels and Revolutionaries: How to Discuss Radical Ideas in the Classroom Without Students Overthrowing Their Professor

Frank Gorgie
Political Science, Belmont University

As our society becomes more polarized, how do we explore controversial subject matter in a way that is fruitful, engaging, and respectful? In creating a political science course to address the issues of legitimacy and the right (or duty) of rebellion, I developed strategies and materials that all instructors can use to enable students to learn collaboratively and think critically about hotly-debated topics. It is possible to advance students' understanding of controversial ideas without them degenerating into "flame wars" and name calling. Through self-examination and establishing a meta-narrative, students develop their abilities to rationally explore opposing views and connect with those "on the other side" in a meaningful and collegiate manner.

Outcomes:
Students examine several areas of political controversy (largely based around US First Amendment protections of speech/religion and press), and then we challenge methods of engagement with regard to history, economy, and culture that give rise to success and failures. A special focus is on the application of best practices in the United States as we address the rapid changes and broadening of diverse demographics as a result of globalism, multinational corporations, and the competing value systems around areas such as same-sex marriage, the Charlie Hebdo attacks, UK speech codes, the firing of the fire chief of Atlanta for his membership in a Bible group, etc.

Category: Application
Describe the theory, approach, and revision that you applied in your course, curriculum, or program. Describe what you saw in your students', colleagues', or institution's behavior that you wanted to change. Describe the learning objectives you wanted students or colleagues to better achieve as a result of your application.
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Describe the project's related course(s) or curriculum, its students, and its place in the curriculum or program.
This application involved Political Science 1210: American Government LLC at Belmont University.

Course Description
This 3-unit class is "an introductory course covering the federal government in the United States."

Learning Community Courses
A Learning Community Course consists of two classes in two different disciplines taught by two different teachers. Connected by a common issue, text, or natural overlap in their content, these two classes are comprised of the exact same set of students.

The primary purpose of the LCC is to build on the understanding of "ways of knowing" developed in the First Year Seminar. The experience of "crossing borders," which is central to the First-year Seminar, will be practiced regularly as students move across the border between two disciplines by completing common assignments, readings, and/or projects.

How is your application different from ones that others have tried?
There are no other relevant courses addressing this area.

Assessment and baseline: Indicate how you determined the success and effectiveness of your application.
I developed an extensive rubric to assess students' capability in addressing issues of history, culture, religion, economics, conflict resolution, allocation of resources, and appropriate representative models. I also created a rubric by which the students' assessed the quality of their classmates' work on collaborative assignments.

References:
References


The mayflower compact. (1620, November 11). Unpublished manuscript.


Videos by Canadian journalist Ezra Levant

Various news outlets covering the Charlie Hebdo attacks

**Organization:**

I will conduct my session primarily using the Socratic Method and lecture.

**Keywords:**

Class Participation
Collaborative Learning
Critical Thinking
Discussion