

Students as Stakeholders in Course Content

Aysegul Aydin

ASSETT Faculty Fellows Program 2022-2023

Final Draft

- Title and summary / description of your project
 - Summary of why, how, what

In this project, I aimed to improve student participation in classroom activities and discussion by developing an active learning strategy. This strategy gives students a greater voice in the creation of course content and the technology tools with which the content is to be delivered. As part of this strategy, students 1) choose the topics that they are interested in exploring as part of the broader theme of the course, 2) create material (podcasts, videos, documentaries, interviews, etc.) that discusses this particular topic, and write questions from the material to guide their classmates through class discussion, 3) prepare a complete syllabus with all its essential components as an end of semester project.

- Describe the challenge you addressed in your department with this project.

In A&S, we have especially crowded classroom and with crowded classrooms, comes the challenge of creating an interactive classroom and ensuring student participation in activities. *Students as stakeholders* project addresses two important and related problems with today's classrooms: 1) lecture oriented teaching: instructors sporadically ask open-ended questions to solicit unstructured student feedback on the material, leading to; 2) fisheye teaching: a handful of students dominates class dialogue, closing up space for others to participate for a variety of reasons. Open-ended questions described above gives students very few options other than public speaking for their voice to be heard. Once this dynamic sets in, instructor finds it harder to change as less participatory students further retreat into their shell. Spur of the moment solutions instructor may come up with (e.g., write your answers on a piece of paper and share it with your classmate) fail to consistently integrate active learning strategies into the syllabus to have the desired effect.

- Describe desired result.

In order to achieve an equitable, inclusive classroom, a goal described in Quality Teaching Initiative, instructors need to ensure that every student participates, and most important perhaps, in a form of their choice. *Students as stakeholders* is based on the idea that students should drive their own learning process. It expects to see that if students are given more choices in what they do and how they do it, the instructor can overcome some of the barriers to participation. It also expects that when such solutions are systematically integrated into the course, they perform better at building expectations of inclusion and voice. In doing so, *Students as stakeholders* allows students to represent content of interest in the format they are most comfortable this, using technology tools such as video/voice recordings, online spaces, and visual accounts as in photojournalism to do so.

- Describe the project. What did you do?

The first implementation of the *Students as Stakeholders* project took place in PSCI3163 American Foreign Policy in Spring 2023. This class was taught for GRAP and had only 13 students, a fraction of traditional classrooms in A&S. Students were asked to prepare an AFP syllabus that included the components below in this order:

- 1) Two topics in AFP that they are interested in exploring,

- 2) Material related to these topics to be distributed to the class; material was defined as broad as possible and included photo-journalistic accounts, podcasts, documentaries and others. Students were asked to include a 5-7 minute voice recording in their post that quickly summarizes the material in a few bullet points and poses three discussion questions,
- 3) An end of semester project they assign to class on 5-7 topics selected from recent foreign policy debates,
- 4) Once these tasks were completed, a course description where they describe what they tried to achieve in their AFP class.

Students first created two weeks of course material in consecutive weeks and shared their work on a discussion board. Their posts included a week overview and objectives, adopting verbs from Bloom's taxonomy. The material they assigned was followed by three questions to guide discussion in class. In the beginning of the semester, we had an exercise where we came up with AFP topics that are of interest to students. Then, we picked and chose topics most frequently cited in the class to discuss (e.g., international aid, cybersecurity), assigned them to weeks and then proceeded to read/view and discuss the material as designed by students. End of semester projects and course descriptions were also shared on discussion boards with classmates. End of semester projects were an exercise that we did not implement but it allowed students to think of assignments that would most accurately measure their knowledge and draw from their strengths. At the end of the semester, students put together the four tasks described above in the format of a syllabus and submitted it as their term project.

- Describe the outcome. What worked, what didn't work, lessons learned.

I learned a great deal from implementing *Students as Stakeholders* in the classroom. I started out with the idea that students will first review original material their classmates assigned using a technology tool. My initial thinking involved having students create material from scratch. I soon figured that students need much more time to create such content and deliver it to the rest of the class. I had to settle with a solution where students assign interactive material from reputable sources while completing a set of tasks related to it (discussion questions, week overview and objectives). This solution, while mostly satisfactory, commonly involved a series of back-and-forth between students and the instructor: students submitted a draft of the assignment and the instructor provided feedback about credibility of the sources, compatibility of objectives with Bloom's taxonomy and relevance of discussion questions to the material before posted on Canvas.

Most of the time, students struggled to differentiate between week objectives and discussion questions, repeating the same ideas in both. Some students were reluctant to put time into searching interactive material and instead, assigned long and tedious readings that were of little interest to undergraduate students. I also figured that students need plenty of time to prepare for this setup: I therefore created gap weeks with no student content and I proceeded to teach those weeks myself. Finally, I came to realize that this learning strategy requires a lot of flexibility in assigning student created content to weeks. The instructor may inquire about topics of interest in the beginning of the semester and then assign those topics to interested students. The schedule should allow time between posting of the content on Canvas and the week when it will be discussed so that other students can view the material (this means two weeks gap between posting and class discussion).

- Reflect on your experience in the Faculty Fellows program and working on your project.

As an instructor, I was always curious about ways to create a more interactive and inclusive classroom setting. My thinking about these issues came to maturation in my ASSETT project, *Students as stakeholders*. Faculty Fellows program allowed me to think more systematically of the

science of teaching whereas the opportunity to discuss these ideas with other fellows contributed immensely to my teaching pedagogy. As part of this experience, I became cognizant of the barriers to efficient use of digital tools in the classroom, by both students and instructors. I was particularly inspired by the Students as Partners discussion we had in Session 3, which largely shaped my thinking of active learning strategies.

- Include other artifacts and visuals (data, weblinks, pictures, student work/examples, write-ups, sharable templates). Student artifacts are particularly impactful.

I include below a syllabus example prepared by one of the AFP students in Spring 2023. I am impressed with the depth and rigor with which students approached this assignment and the quality of the product. Their projects displayed a good understanding of relevant topics in AFP and included a wide variety of weekly material to be shared with others. I also asked students to submit a reflection paragraph on this experience and here are some takeaways from their feedback:

“Creating the syllabus was a very eye opening experience as it forced me to better my own understanding of course material, and how they relate to global events. The final part of the syllabus creation, the creation of a course introduction, was the most difficult part. To concisely summarize what this course was about involved really understanding the weight of what exactly the important key concepts we learned were.”

“I found that there were some parts of this assignment that were a bit more difficult to complete than other parts. The questions, first and foremost were the most difficult for me to come up with. These questions had to be created in a way where they weren’t too specific, because them being too specific can make the answers too easy to find; or in some cases, the questions, when they are created to specific, can kind of give the answers away. They had to be created in a way where they were broad, but not being too broad also.”

“Preparing the syllabus was a lot more fun than I thought it would be. I certainly enjoyed it more than having to write a research paper. I got to choose topics I’m passionate about rather than ramble on for some mediocre paper.”

“It was very interesting to take the place of a teacher of a course like this and create an introduction to the course, sample discussion posts and plans, and a project. It is definitely important to consider how vital sourcing good information is for your class, especially sources that fit the attention span of a standard student. Some sources can be too lengthy or dense, so it definitely was important to consider where I sourced my information from and how I presented it in a way that was easily understandable to a typical freshman class.”

PSCI 3136: American Foreign Policy

University of Colorado at Boulder

Syllabus Spring Semester 2023

MWF: 1:25 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

Elizabeth Gomez Solis

Email: elgo5873@colorado.edu

Office Hours: **W 12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.**

Course Description:

This semester in American Foreign Policy, we will dive into historical events within American foreign policies, understanding institutions, interactions, and interests. This course is designed for you to get a better understanding of what politics look like in time of uncertainty, and panic. We will look at how relations internationally to get a better sense of what government leaders do in their role, and how it affects the people of their country, and the people abroad/overseas.

We will be exploring several topics, ranging from basic questions like what American foreign policy is. To exploring questions that make you question "why? Is there a better way to do that? and even Who would do this?" There will be several readings in this class to help prepare and give you reasons to help you answer those questions. The main goal of the class is to expose students to a world of foreign policy, and to show students that what leaders do in one country does have an effect in other countries that are involved in any sort of relations.

In addition, students will understand policy debates better, and learn theories that coincide with general policymaking, theories in foreign policy, as well as what drives the force behind policy making and foreign policy decisions. We will be looking at small actions taken by presidents, government officials, and using critical thinking, analyze everything that went behind making these decisions and what impacts it had. As well as critically analyzing the "what if" solutions and determining what would the outcome have looked like if they hadn't chosen to do what they did.

Material:

Refugees in the U.S

Overview: This week, the task is to understand the situation of refugees, from other countries to the United States.

Objectives:

- Recognize what was occurring *globally* in the late 1900s, specifically 1960-1990?
- Breakdown the effects the wave of refugees had on the economy of the U.S particularly
- Discuss policy reforms that were created in the 1980s.

Readings: The history of Cambodians in Stockton and the organization that has helped thousands of refugees; <https://www.abc10.com/article/news/community/race-and-culture/cambodians-stockton-refugees-khmer/103-6f8142c2-c52f-4160-bdf1-9f1278e3dbe9>Links to an external site.

Things to Consider:

- What kind of benefits did the APSARA have for the Stockton community?
- What was the situation that many Cambodians were in that led them to flee to the U.S?
- How does Mao explain the Khmer community now? More than a decade after the wave of Cambodians entered California in the late 1980s?

Proxy Wars and Counterinsurgency

Overview: The effects of warfare on US citizens

Objectives:

- Understand the conflict political leaders have when it comes to foreign action
- Identify policies the US president adopted during the Vietnam War
- Evaluate the anti-war movement about the Vietnam war in the US

Readings: The End of American Exceptionalism? The Cold War and Vietnam pages. 28-38

Discussion Questions:

- What is meant by the Vietnamization policy Nixon adopted?
- How many US soldiers occurred under Nixon's new strategy, between 1969 and 1973?
- What is the Tet Offensive?

End of the Semester Project:

There will be an end-of-semester project, cumulating all the knowledge and policies we've learned since being in this American Foreign Policy course. I'd like you to create a short PowerPoint presentation. Choose a topic on any of the material we've covered in class, and represent what it is, the importance of it, what it did, etc. in just five photos.

These five photos should be able to tell us all about what your chosen topic WITHOUT having any words or bullet points on the presentation. You will describe what these pictures mean in significance to your chosen topic, *without giving away what topic you chose until the end*. The other students in the class will have a chance to give their idea/guess of what you are talking about based off the short presentation and photos you will be showing. What you should achieve in the end, is a greater understanding of one concept/policy/idea from the AFP class, so much so that you can describe important events from your main concept, and people will be able to tell almost instantly what it is you've chosen.

Here are some topics to help give you an idea of what you could present about:

- Relations between Russia and the U.S
<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-03-31/russia-seeks-to-balance-us-me-et-existential-threats-in-new-foreign-policy-doctrine>Links to an external site.
- The U.S sanctions and relations with China
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/27/business/bain-china.html?searchResultPosition=7>
Links to an external site.
- Tensions with U.S Russia and Iran Sanctions
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/27/us/politics/sanctions-russia-intelligence-iran-evan-gershkovich.html?searchResultPosition=8>
- Presidential Changes
<https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/04/27/a-post-erdogan-turkey-would-only-partly-change-its-foreign-policy>
- The UK's evacuation & plans with Sudan
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/30/sudan-final-uk-flight-leaves-as-evacuation-operation-ends>