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The Political Communication Teaching Database: A Resource for Pedagogical Inspiration and Innovation¹

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An excellent teacher is often portrayed as someone who engages deeply with students, guiding them to think critically and envision a better future. This figure is sometimes romanticized in popular culture, as in *Dead Poets Society*, where the teacher becomes a catalyst for students to think independently, challenge authority, and pursue lives of purpose. Such portrayals highlight the potential of educators to challenge hierarchies and inspire civic engagement.

As political communication scholars, our community embraces this transformative potential while advancing research that shapes media debates and informs public policy. However, one of our most direct and enduring contributions to society is through our teaching. Our scholarship, when incorporated into educational materials, can teach students how to approach knowledge critically, identify injustices, and apply what they’ve learned to make a meaningful impact on the world. At its best, political communication education prepares students to be better citizens and equips them to become change agents in society.

Yet, the importance of teaching is often overshadowed by research, and we currently lack a common platform to share, discuss, and develop best practices for teaching our field. We developed the [Political Communication Teaching Database²](http://politicalcommunication.org) to help foster such a platform. The database offers an online repository where teachers can share their course materials for others in the community to view, download, and adapt for use in their own courses.

In this report, we first outline how the database works and how you can contribute to it. Then, we explain our motivations for developing the database. While it is certainly a resource aimed

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² Currently the database is in offline beta mode as we collect uploads – the database will go live in Fall 2025, once we have collected enough uploads to populate it.

at helping us improve our courses and teaching, these motivations are secondary to improving learning for our students. Significant advancements in the quality of teaching and learning for political communication require more than a database. Therefore, the third aim of this report is to call upon our division to more actively engage with, and contribute to, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) within political education.

We hope that in the near-term, the database serves as a useful resource for pedagogical inspiration and the exchange of effective teaching strategies. However, our longer-term vision is that the database works to facilitate teaching collaborations, spur pedagogical innovation, and encourage the reporting of best practices in the political education scholarship. Given the increased societal importance of our research, it is high time to dedicate more effort to ensuring that our teaching practices are as cutting edge, evidence based, and socially impactful as our research.

Database Functionality: How to Upload and How to Search

The database relies on contributions from teachers, who can upload teaching materials using [this form](#). In practice, the materials are not actually transferred to the database. Instead, contributors generate a shared link to a folder where their materials are stored locally (such as Google Drive, Dropbox, or a university repository). In addition to this shared link, the form collects information such as: an upload description, the language and education level of materials, the areas of political communication they are relevant for, and types of materials included (e.g., lectures, seminars, assignments, etc.). Please see the [upload guide](#) for more detailed information on what the form includes, as well as some tips to structure your materials and help others find them.

The information collected through the form is used to index the uploaded materials, so that they are searchable in the database. There are three main ways to search the database, and each returns a spreadsheet that includes: the upload title, the instructor's name, the language of materials, and a short preview of the upload description. If you click on a row, you will be presented with the full information about the upload, as well as the link to download the materials. Thus, the preview allows you to get an overview of returned results and cycle through them quickly. Then, you can click on each row to read more information about the upload and decide whether you would like to download the materials. Below, we provide a brief overview of the three search methods, which are discussed in more detail in the database's "Search Guide."

The first search method is a free text search, which will return results that match keywords from the form. Importantly, the free text search matches keywords that contributors write themselves in the upload description, which allows contributors to add information beyond what is asked in the form. The second search method is to use filters, which help narrow the results by language, education level, types of materials, and a set of 50 thematic tags relating

to various areas of political communication (e.g., “Activism/Social Movements,” “Public Opinion,” or “Qualitative Methodology”).

If neither of the above methods is sufficiently useful or specific enough, you can combine filters with a free text search. With this third search method, you would first set a series of filters: for example, on the language of instruction and the educational level you teach. Then, you can enter your own keywords in the search bar to see if there are results that match your keywords within the filters (in this example, the language and education level you have set).

Likely, you will need to try each of the search methods to uncover what works best for your use case, given the current set of materials uploaded to the database. If you find that no suitable materials exist in the database, we hope that you develop them and upload them for others to use.

Motivations: Why is Teaching so Overlooked?

For over three decades, universities have actively promoted the “research/teaching nexus”—i.e., the idea that these two pillars of higher education should have a strong relation to one another (Tight, 2016). It is perhaps indicative of a broader bias that the word research comes first, since the research/teaching nexus is often conceptualized (and marketed by universities) as research-led teaching. Research-led teaching entails that teachers should also be active researchers in the subjects they teach, despite empirical evidence that there is no correlation between research output and teaching effectiveness (Hattie and Marsh, 1996). Nevertheless, the prioritization of research over teaching is reinforced both culturally and institutionally in universities worldwide.

For example, we regularly read, review, and write publications that relate to our research interests. However, estimates suggest that nearly one-third of political educators have *never* read an article, chapter, or book on the scholarship of teaching and learning, or SoTL (Doleys, 2025). Yet, we’d wager that the majority of members in our community teach and further, that there is an imbalance in attention to the SoTL scholarship relative to our teaching loads.

In other words, many of us are contractually obliged to teach at a significant percentage of our working time. However, few of us likely pay proportionate attention to the state-of-the-art in pedagogical best practices around important aspects such as: course design, assessment methodologies, and the accommodation of diverse learning preferences and (dis)abilities. Such a culture is rather unsurprising when one considers its institutional determinants, beginning at the doctoral level. Most doctoral students receive little—if any—pedagogical training (Stein, 2024). Nevertheless, they are often thrust into the classroom and, in some contexts, are even tasked with developing entire courses with minimal guidance on how to do so.

Overlooking the scholarship of teaching and learning is, in many cases, institutionally reinforced: pedagogical research tends to be undervalued in hiring decisions, tenure applications, and grant funding. While inattention to SoTL doesn't necessarily make us bad teachers, it likely implies that we are missing the opportunity to make very small changes to our teaching that can have a huge impact for students. Simple tweaks such as adapting slides, setting clear expectations for assignments through 'transparent' instructions (Winkelmes et al., 2016), or utilizing classroom assessment techniques (CATs) can help students learn while simultaneously helping us identify what is—and is not—working to achieve learning in our classrooms.

While we design our teaching with the best of intentions, we often rely on our own assessments to evaluate our own effectiveness. If students did the same, then everyone would receive an "A." Assessment requires external evaluation by definition, and the Teaching Database is one way to "open up" our teaching materials for others to view, use, and ultimately help improve the effectiveness of our teaching as a community.

A Call to Contribute: To the Database, and to a Pedagogy of Political Communication

Why create a Political Communication Teaching Database? On the one hand, it's inherently valuable to see how others are teaching our discipline, and it's certainly practical to share materials to reduce the time that we spend on developing classes and courses. Yet, on the other hand, we hope that the database orients a much-needed focus to *researching our teaching*, developing best practices for the community, and sharing our results to benefit the scholarship of teaching and learning more broadly.

Despite being one of the largest divisions within ICA and APSA, Political Communication does not register as a field that contributes to the political education literature, which is consistently dominated by International Relations, American Politics, and Civic Engagement (e.g., Craig, 2014; Kammerer & Higashi, 2021; Murphy et al., 2023). Many of our courses teach these topics from a communication perspective, but we are not yet recognized in this literature as a field in our own right. In our view, correcting this oversight is not only feasible; it is a worthwhile endeavor that can significantly improve the quality of political communication education for our students.

Journals such as the *Journal of Political Science Education*, *European Political Science*, *International Studies Perspectives*, and *PS: Political Science and Politics* actively solicit submissions that offer reflections of teaching experiences, reports of pedagogical innovations, or empirical assessments of learning. These submissions are often shorter than research articles (e.g., 4,000-5,000 words instead of 8,000), have much higher acceptance rates (e.g., 60% versus 10%), and have significantly lower methodological requirements than those that we are used to with political communication research. For example, a few focus groups with students

or a pre-and post-assignment survey, even with small-N's, can help evaluate a new assignment or teaching intervention where evidence is sorely lacking.

Yet, these lower barriers to publication do not imply that publishing in pedagogical journals is “easy.” Doing so requires thorough engagement with SoTL research, which is time well spent for at least three reasons. First, learning from the literature on learning helps teachers impart knowledge more effectively, cater to student diversity, and align teaching methods to best prepare students to be active and participatory citizens. Second, although teaching resources are scarce, investing time to learn principles of course and assignment design pays dividends as courses are taught over multiple semesters or handed over to other, potentially more inexperienced teachers. Third—and probably most valued by our students—ensuring that assessment practices are transparent, equitable, and fair helps reduce biases in our grading and mitigate complaints from students. In short, investing time in the research on teaching pays off for students (better learning), for teachers (better evaluations), and for teacher-researchers (better understanding of how to identify, test, and ultimately advance the pedagogical state-of-the-art).

A Resource for Pedagogical Inspiration and Innovation

Undoubtedly, excellent teaching and learning practices are happening within political communication classrooms worldwide. However, this excellence is difficult for the community to see without a shared repository of materials, and it is even more difficult to assess without a concerted effort toward researching (and publishing) our teaching best practices in the scholarship of teaching and learning. In some ways, our community's lack of presence in the political education literature is a disadvantage, as we do not have a vast repository of effective teaching materials to draw from. The Political Communication Teaching Database is one step towards improving how and what we teach.

Yet in other ways, a lack of collective teaching knowledge positions us well to chart a new path forward. Fields with less presence in the education literature are in prime position to design new innovations in teaching practices. As Krippendorff argues (2011, 416), design is different from the process of “re-search”—that is, explaining the present through the past. Rather, design “creates new futures by suggesting how to intervene in the present,” by exploring “what is variable [and] combinable into new artifacts.” When design principles are applied to teaching, new assignments can be created by drawing inspiration from the political education literature and combining them to teach key aspects of political communication to our students in novel ways (Bossetta, *In Press*).

Our intent is that the Teaching Database serves as a resource for teaching inspiration and innovation, rather than “just” replication. That is to say, it is unlikely that a lecture or seminar activity that you find in the database will be a perfect fit for your course. Factors such as different class lengths, student numbers, and institutional cultures work against the one-to-one

replication of course materials from one context to another. However, by engaging with SoTL research, teachers from our community can learn how to best make these adaptations, innovate new teaching strategies, and hopefully share their experiences in the literature to positively impact the political education scholarship more broadly.

We all strive to be better teachers. We want our students to learn, to enjoy learning, and to apply what they've learned to thrive in the world. However, the Teaching Database was not built only to make us better teachers. Rather, it was built to help us better fulfill our responsibility as educators to transfer, receive, and co-create knowledge with our students. Our time with students is short, but when political communication is taught with care, attention, and purpose, it can fundamentally change how students understand power, challenge injustice, and engage in civic life. We hope the Teaching Database sharpens our shared sense of responsibility as educators—and sparks the kind of pedagogical innovation that empowers students to strive to shape the world far beyond our classrooms.

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