Lesson Study

“Enhancing Student Understandings of U.S. Political Ideology”

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CONTINGENCIES IN STUDYING POLITICAL VALUES

(1) In the real world of politics, “values” is not an option because . . .

• A diversity of interests and values within society is a given, more so with each passing generation . . .

• Politics arises from conflict over what a human community ought to do . . .

• The diversity of the “oughts” is a reflection of diversity of ideological value systems . . .

• Students – whether they are aware of it or not – are part of those systems . . . as are professors, too!!
(2) A Paradox of Ideology

- Many students’ self-conception does not embrace the ideology within themselves
- “Ideology is something others do/have, but not me!”

- **Two “Arch-types” . . .**
  - The “Moderate” – The “Pragmatist”
  - The “True Believer” – “Truth & Error”

- **Two “Lessons” in One . . .**
  - For the Moderate: How their pragmatism is an amalgam of existing cultural forms!
  - For the Believer: How their certainty is a consequence of their value commitments, not the other way round!!
(3) **Discussion Leader vis-à-vis Advocacy** –

- The students’ opinions will reflect each of the “schools” of ideological thinking being presented.
- Instructor’s Values must be “bracketted”.
- Instructor Respect for ideological diversity among students is absolutely necessary.
- Being an Advocate in turn for each ideology might be the best method for neutrality.
(4) **A Tyranny of Labels...**

Labels *versus* Slogans & Epithets –
Best Advice: Follow the labels of the readings, but be flexible!

**“The Right”** –
- “Traditional Conservatism”
  - Social Conservatism
  - Cultural Conservatism
- “Individualist Conservatism”
  - Libertarianism
  - Economic Conservative

**“The Left”** –
- “Reform Liberalism”
  - New Deal Liberalism
  - Great Society Liberalism
- “Liberation Ideologies”
  - Civil Rights Movement
  - Race, Ethnicity, Gender
STUDENT LEARNING GOALS:

A. To describe the key value positions of each ideology

B. To demonstrate how each ideology applies to current political issues

C. To experience their own diversity of political thinking
TEACHING COMPONENTS:

1) Opening Worksheet
2) Questions for Compare and Contrast
3) Class Lectures and Discussions
4) Compare and Contrast Worksheet
5) On-Line Quiz
6) Written Assignments on Ideology
In small groups, students ponder a series of statements (left). Students must decide whether they AGREE or DISAGREE with each statement, recording their responses on an answer grid (below).
TEACHING COMPONENTS: Opening Worksheet

Research Technique:

• Each statement is a claim-of-fact which actually rests within a particular ideological perspective.
• Through the act of agreeing or disagreeing, a respondent must access his/her own values – which will be reflected in pattern created on the Grid.
• The pattern (in theory) reveals the broad ideological orientation of a respondent.
• BUT ➔ No Two Patterns are ever the Same!

Use in Class:

• Comparing Patterns ➔ Diversity & Individuality
• Goal C above
TEACHING COMPONENTS: Questions
These are the broad issues of western political philosophy. Here, there are used as conceptual anchor-points, that is as the basis of a study in compare and contrast.

1. **What is the “Good” Person?** – A question about “human nature” – How does each ideology characterize proper behavior and scope of legitimate human action?

2. **What is the “Good” Society?** – A question about desirable social conditions, and about why we do not have them – How does each ideology advocate for certain kinds of social reforms?

3. **Who Ought to Govern?** - A question about responsible political leadership – How does each ideology prefer certain kinds of people hold the power of government?

4. **What is the “Good” Government?** – A question about the proper role and ends of government in society.
TEACHING COMPONENTS: Compare and Contrast

Worksheet

At the last and in the same small groups, students review and complete a worksheet (right) demonstrating skill at both identification and application. This activity is not graded.

Goals 2 and 3, above.

The responses are assessed for accuracy on a 12-point scale.
TEACHING COMPONANTS: On-Line Quiz

• A multiple-choice quiz on US political ideologies is required of each student as a graded-assignment.

Question Types:
• Prompt: A Policy Position – Choice: Which Ideology

  Questions of Application

• Prompt: Ideology – Choice: Which Policy Position Most Likely

  Questions of Identification

TEACHING COMPONANTS: Written Assignments on Ideology

As part of a larger research assignment investigating current political issues, students locate “punditry” on their issue and subject it to an ideological analysis.
ASSESSMENTS:

Opening Worksheet
Not assessed – No concern with whether students’ values changed

Follow-Up Worksheet
Did students demonstrate skill at applying their knowledge?

There was variation in how well students consistently identified positions and justifications. Students did better or worse overall. But, even those students who did well (the left end) had one or two ‘gaps’. This is a base-line for future research.
ASSESSMENTS:

On-Line Quiz
1. Does an analysis of the scores from the on-line quiz show evidence of competence in identifying and applying their knowledge of US political ideologies?
2. Is there evidence that the use of the worksheets foster greater competence among students?

GRAPH 2 – Average Percent Correct By Question, Fall 2010 and Spring 2012

The available data indicate moderate to good improvement in student competence on both fronts arising from the use of the Follow-Up Worksheet.
ASSESSMENTS:

On-Line Quiz

GRAPH 3 – Average Percent Correct on Questions of Identification

Similar trends can be seen with examining quiz questions testing identification of each ideologies basic values, and in quiz questions testing application.

GRAPH 4 – Percentage Correct on Questions of Application
EVALUATION:

The structured activity introduced with the ‘Follow-Up Worksheet’ can be associated with better measures of competence.

Nonetheless, significant gaps in those same measures.

Therefore, further refinement of the Plan is in order.