

NEWS

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Teaching Business Students

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American Government

by Stewart P. Shapiro, Bentley College

Introduction

The teaching of an introductory course in American Government can be a difficult and frustrating endeavor under even the best of circumstances. Given the general level of cynicism and/or lack of interest by large numbers of Americans regarding politics and politicians, the task of generating student enthusiasm, or even mild interest, toward the subject matter can indeed be an arduous one. When the teaching of such a course takes place in a business college, and when the student audience is "captive" to a college requirement that all students must take the course, the task can be rendered considerably more formidable.

For the past six years I have been teaching such courses at business colleges — one year at Bryant College in Rhode Island, and the following five years at Bentley College in Massachusetts. In this article I will discuss some of the general problems that I have experienced in teaching these courses, and which I believe to be inherent in such an academic environment. I will explain the varying degrees of success — or lack thereof — that I have had in attempting to deal with such problems while trying to educate students regarding how and why America's political system tends to operate as it does. In addition, I will discuss some of the issues that have arisen in the attempt, not only to generate student interest in political science as an academic discipline, but also in the effort to get students more concerned with, and involved in, the political world outside of the classroom.

Before discussing the teaching of American Government in an environment in which student reactions toward the subject matter generally run the gamut from apathy to fear to hostility, I will explain a few important factors regarding the curriculum at Bentley College in particular and at business colleges in general. Most important of these factors is that it is

not usually the case that liberal arts courses are but a minuscule component of the overall business college curriculum. The Accreditation Council of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business requires that at least 40% of the curriculum be in non-business subjects.¹ There can be a good deal of variation within this 40% minimum. Bentley, for example, offers a fairly broad range of liberal arts requirements and electives in areas like political science, philosophy, history and English, while also offering a few team-taught interdisciplinary courses which have proven to be quite popular with students.

Given this commitment by the college to a sizable liberal arts component for each student's education, those of us teaching required liberal arts courses at Bentley in areas like political science are at a considerable advantage over faculty who teach such courses at schools which do not make them a requirement. When a college has made any course, or set of courses, mandatory for all students, it has, in effect, told students that such courses are important. The required courses thereby attain a significant level of academic legitimacy.

The fact that a particular course in political science may be required does not, however, eliminate the major problems involved in generating student interest in it. Many students already have tuned out the subject matter insofar as it being of any concern to them or in any way relevant to their future careers. The required nature of the course may force the student both to take and to pass "American Government," but it certainly does not force him/her either to enjoy it or to learn more than the absolute minimum from the experience. Again, as alluded to earlier, this is a difficult issue in almost any college or university, but it can be heightened at a business college.

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Public Policy Administration

by Richard A. Brumbach
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Considering the turn that business-government relations have taken in the past 25 years, it is not surprising that a new field of study has developed to examine the business environment, especially the relationship between business and the public policy process. This new field of business and its environment, sometimes called business and society or business, government, and society, is an important field in schools of business administration (Buchholz, *Curriculum Development*, iii).

Social issues and resulting social regulation began to appear in the early 1960's. The contrast between these new social policies and the older more "friendly" industrial and competitive regulations made business in this country painfully aware of the need for new requirements in business education that deal with social and political dimensions of the business environment heretofore largely ignored.

Social issues like the environment and consumerism have caused such a great expenditure of time and resources that business has looked for new and better methods of dealing with post-industrial social phenomena. The first efforts made by the business community were directed at thwarting social policy and proved to be largely unproductive; more unproductive it soon seemed than if business had somehow joined in the public policy process and had some input into the design of the new social regulations.

One of the principal ways of becoming engaged in the upstream end of social issues was to develop awareness of the social and political aspects of business management among new managers being trained in our schools of business throughout the country. This meant the establishment of a new area of study of students of business. Toward this end the Social Issues Management

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