Research Articles, Not Research Papers: Empowering Students Through Research Writing
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Both students and instructors are frequently frustrated by research paper assignments because they involve only part of the research article writing process. I argue that integrating the entire article writing process into a course empowers students to work as political scientists, makes the discipline relevant, provides critical writing skills, and improves classroom climate. I discuss my journey developing courses based on the research article writing process, describing strengths and weaknesses of this approach. Additionally, I highlight research-based simulations as a key component of article writing that helps students understand the importance of political science. I encourage instructors to embrace the shift in thinking associated with teaching the research article writing process, the results of which substantially benefit students.

(3962 words)

In my first course as a teaching assistant, the instructor asked students to write a paper articulating a novel theoretical argument based on assigned readings on social justice. Reading through several rough drafts, I noticed that most students successfully summarized the assigned readings, but then proceeded to re-state one of the authors' theoretical arguments. Out of curiosity, I asked a student why he had not developed his own theory. The student explained that he was unsure how to write a theoretical argument and that he lacked anything valuable to add to existing work. I realized that the student did not feel that he was part of the discipline, and that he had not been shown how his own ideas and experiences could lead to new, valuable, and relevant political science insights. Since then, I have begun to guide students in all my courses through the research article writing process. I have found that empowering students to work through the research article writing process as professional political scientists (1) is an effective way to make political science relevant, (2) teaches critically undersupplied writing skills applicable to many future careers, and (3) creates an inclusive and collaborative classroom climate.

I begin by reflecting on several initial attempts at using research-based assignments to engage students. These piecemeal approaches led me to design my introductory and upper-level comparative politics courses around the research article writing process. This process involves separating a research article into its constituent components and devoting substantial time to helping students produce drafts of each component that they combine together into a completed research article by the end of the course. I especially highlight my use of research-based simulations — a collaborative policymaking activity based on student research --- as a key part of making student research relevant and meaningful. Research-based simulations are also an accessible way for instructors to test out teaching the research article writing process in their

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courses. Completing the research article writing process is more than turning in a research paper. By working through the article writing process, students operate in the same space as the authors of published journal articles that we read in class. Once students fully understand their new role as political scientists, they frequently exceed both my expectations and their own.

Initial Research-Based Assignments

I initially assumed that junior and senior political science majors knew how to write literature reviews and theoretical arguments --- what are typically termed "research papers." This assumption was driven partly by the fact that these activities are so frequently assigned in upper-level undergraduate courses, and partly because I utilize these skills often. During my first time as a teaching assistant, I realized that students' exposure to and practice with these concepts was limited, regardless of their grade level or experience in the major. My first attempt at a solution was to pick a research paper component and to build interesting substantive content to provide students with many opportunities to develop that component. That is, I felt that the traditional research paper model could be improved.

I had the opportunity to play an active role in helping students develop a theoretically grounded research paper in the subsequent semester. The course --- Political Protest and Violence --- naturally lent itself to many interesting case studies wherein students could innovate on existing theoretical models using the case facts as a guide. Along with trying to spark students' interest in the assignment early, the instructor and I set several intermediate deadlines (e.g., a thesis statement and a partial draft) in an attempt to encourage students to start working on the paper and to seek guidance if they were unsure how to develop a theoretical argument. We had some success: student interest in the final papers improved, but most theoretical arguments still failed to articulate a unique contribution.

Around this time, I started thinking about what I could do to further scaffold this end-of-semester research paper assignment. By chance, I was working on revising a syllabus in order to co-teach a course titled Immigration, Identity, and the Internet. One of the chief goals of the course was to develop student writing ability, and the main pedagogical tool used was repetition and instructor review. Students drafted a literature review and had a one-on-one tutorial meeting with the instructor before turning in a final draft, repeating the process several times throughout the semester. I thought that the draft and repetition idea could be effective, but I wondered if scaffolding a literature review paper before a theoretical argument paper could help make the literature review more relevant and improve the structure of and innovation in the theoretical paper. In the revised syllabus, we encouraged, but did not require, students to link their literature review to their theory, and we added peer review to the existing instructor tutorials.

We faced a challenge before students even submitted their final literature reviews. Based on my experience from previous semesters, I was prepared to work with students' literature reviews to develop the subsequent theory papers. What I did not expect was that the students, mostly senior political science majors, did not know how to write a literature review. Students felt that they knew how to complete the assignment and said so ahead of time, but their literature reviews were almost entirely disconnected summaries of various readings. It was during this experience that I concluded that students would be best served by integrating the entire research article writing process into as many courses as possible including, but not limited to, introductory courses. Repeatedly assigning a literature review or theory research paper in many different courses does little to provide students with the space to build and reinforce their writing skills if instructors do not teach students how political scientists complete this task.

Research Article Framework

My initial rationale for adopting research article writing assignments in all of my introductory and substantive courses was the simple motivation that students needed practice and instruction in order to successfully complete literature reviews and theory papers. I took all of the weight previously assigned to exams and other papers and put it into a series of scaffolded research article assignments (about 50% of the course points). In any given course, students are free to choose any research question of interest within the bounds of the course topic. The course is split into units, where students work through the research question; annotated bibliography and literature review; theoretical argument; research design; and introduction, abstract, and conclusion sequentially (see Figure 1). In each unit, students read journal articles that relate to a relevant substantive topic and to the article component we are working on. Students write a reading journal before class that reflects on both substantive and article writing content, and class time is evenly split between these two topics. For example, when reading about electoral systems and working on the theory part of their article, students critically analyze the hypotheses authors presented in substantive journal articles on electoral systems. Toward the end of every unit, students submit drafts of their research article, adding the new components and revising what they have already written. This is followed by peer review and instructor evaluation.

<Figure 1 about here>

Though I did not fully realize it at the time, guiding students through the research article writing process is akin to inviting them to become political scientists. Political scientists work through the research article writing process; they do not write standalone literature reviews or theoretical arguments. Hence, the writing practice inherent in research article writing is a side benefit to empowering students to become part of the discipline. From this perspective, it became clear that the best course of action was to integrate other "things political scientists do" into my courses.

Being a political scientist means sharing ideas, collaborating, making public policy connections, working with the community, and developing writing and critical thinking skills. Though most students will not have careers as political scientists, critical thinking, writing, and collaboration are all widely sought-after skills. Working through the research article writing process is the most natural vehicle for integrating these aspects into a course because students are participating in generating knowledge in the same format as the published journal articles that they read.

Political scientists use their research articles as building blocks for other important components of their work. I seek to expose students to this process in class. Peer reviews and short presentations provide opportunities for students to learn from and teach one another and to reinforce course concepts. Simulations mimic real-world applied work that naturally extends from student research and can help students see the ways in which their work relates to policy. Since students are completing the entire research article process, their conclusions often speak to local community issues, which makes it easy to integrate course components on community engagement.

Finally, student ownership of their research article and the responsibility to teach others about it promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. Students develop a common identity as political scientists wherein they learn that they need to rely on classmates for help

throughout the research article writing process. Because most students have not written a research article before, students begin the process from the same starting point, regardless of their major or life experiences. As such, research article writing has had a positive impact on my classroom climate, with students leveraging their colleagues' diversity and perspectives in a serious and meaningful way.

Asking students to work through the research article writing process prompted a shift in the way I think about educating students beyond the actual assignment. To me, there is no reason why the actual work political scientists do should be relegated to senior capstone experiences or to individual research with instructors. These opportunities are inequitably provided to selected majors late in their careers, while other students take political science courses lacking these learning outcomes. The components of research article writing are not particularly complex, and they can be taught. In order to do so, research article writing requires investment on the part of the instructor and a change in the power dynamic between the instructor and students.

The exciting part about working with students through the article writing process is that they raise new questions and problems all of the time. I have found that embracing these new questions and problems is the most productive way forward. Students are often best equipped to lead the discussion of their research articles, with the instructor serving in an advising role. More practically, focusing on research article writing presents numerous challenges. Course content must be pared down to make room for writing instruction. Summative assessments take creativity to implement effectively. Course enrollment matters for how much individual attention instructors can provide to each student. The overall model is flexible to adapt to these challenges. For example, instructors could scaffold the article writing assignment across courses to have students complete an article draft minus empirical analysis in introductory courses, to hone in on research design and quantitative analysis in upper-level courses, and to create publication ready work in senior capstones.

The Ebb and Flow of the Article Writing Process
When incorporating the research article writing process into a course, I have found it very important to keep up with and manage student expectations. Students react to different parts of the research article writing process in similar ways to career political scientists. However, students are typically writing a research article for the first time, so they do not know if the difficulties they are facing or their lack of confidence at certain points is normal. Part of inviting students to become political scientists showing them that the published journal articles they read started out as rough drafts just like the article drafts they are writing for the course. Each section of the research article requires different forms of expectations management.

Initial student excitement and interest in the research writing process is generally enough to last through the research question stage. As long as I encourage students to come up with questions that they are interested in and questions based on some important public policy problem, students usually have many ideas. Refining initial ideas and settling on a final research question takes some extra time for students with limited experience reading political science research. However, most initial research ideas can be turned into workable research questions without too much difficulty.

Literature reviews are generally where students get discouraged, regardless of prior experience. Conducting a literature review almost always reveals one of two situations: either much research has already been done on the students' research question or there is essentially no existing literature. In the former case, it is critical to help the student return to her initial research

question and policy motivation to try to identify at least one small difference between existing work and the research question. Since I find that students usually become interested in research questions because of actual public policy problems, there is almost always some nuance to a real-world case that is missing from existing literature. When students' find this nuance, they are set to write an interesting theory.

Students are creative thinkers, and they are bound to generate research ideas that speak to little existing literature in political science. Many of these ideas pertain to research areas that the discipline has long marginalized like identity-based issues or political history and sociology. Other research questions are too new to appear in political science journals. In these cases, I advocate helping students find alternative sources --- including those from other disciplines --- instead of telling them to generate a new research idea. If the research question and the contribution that students develop is interesting to them and is relevant to public policy, I do not let the lack of perceived importance in the discipline stand in students' way. Most theoretical arguments can be successfully constructed if these research question and literature review issues are worked out.

The next hurdle is the research design, and student motivations and feelings at this point tend to differ depending on whether they must conduct the empirical analysis or not. If the empirical analysis is required, students may propose conservative research designs that they feel that they can implement, but that only partially test their theory. On the other hand, if students do not conduct the empirical analysis, then they may propose an ambitious design and be unsatisfied that they never get to analyze results to bring closure to their article. In both cases, I advocate for having students develop primary and secondary research designs, with one design using conveniently available data and the other relying on some causal identification strategy where new data collection is required. Students analyzing data for a results section can focus on the available data for their primary research design so that the empirical analysis is achievable, while those not analyzing empirical data can highlight the best possible causally identified design. The advantage of asking students to include both a primary and a secondary design is that describing available data is more familiar, whereas thinking about the best possible research design is more exciting and informative.

I find the last part of the article writing process --- putting together an introduction, abstract, and conclusion --- essential, as it allows students to walk away from the course with a fully finished research article. Conclusions also provide a great place to integrate policy implications from the research-based simulation's policy briefing paper discussed below. Adding these relatively straightforward components that we work on a lot during class time also spaces out assignments in the course so that they land at different times than traditional mid-semester and final exams in other courses. Research article writing takes significant time and effort, and I find it worthwhile to devote the last several classes of the semester to students' polishing their articles, presenting them, and celebrating their achievements.

Research-Based Simulations: An Accessible Pedagogy
My main piece of advice for instructors interested in structuring their courses around the research article writing process is to treat students as political scientists and to let this idea guide course design decisions. I fully realize that a shift to research article writing is a big step and that interested instructors may want to try out part of this pedagogy before fully adopting it. At the same time, I have already noted that just assigning students to write one part of a research article is unlikely to produce desirable results. Research-based simulations act as an accessible way to

quickly bring in some of the core ideas of the research article writing process without needing to re-design an entire course or curriculum.

The assignments that I call "research-based simulations" have three core components: an individual research-based task that students complete before the simulation, a small group public policy component, and a class long legislative simulation exercise. Preparing for and completing the simulation encapsulates most of the learning goals inherent in the research article writing process, albeit in a much shorter timeframe. In my courses, the simulation takes place right after students have developed their research questions, literature reviews, and theoretical arguments Around this time, students tend to begin questioning how the theory that they developed applies to practical situations. Students take their theory and hypotheses and use them as evidence to write a policy briefing paper. The idea is to help students to think of their research article as providing a potential solution to an important public policy problem and, likewise, to describe how a public policy problem can be solved based on the theoretical argument that they developed.

In order to adapt this assignment to a context where the simulation is not part of a broader research article writing effort, instructors can rely more heavily on the research that goes into the policy briefing paper. In my experience, students working through the research article writing process have already developed basically all of the briefing paper: their research question is based on some real public policy problem, their literature review identifies potential solutions, and their theoretical argument provides guidance on the solution most likely to work. For instructors employing a research-based simulation in a course without the emphasis on the research article writing process, I suggest investing more time in guiding students through each part of the briefing paper, providing essentially a mini lesson on asking research questions, referring to literature, and developing hypotheses.

With the briefing paper done, the other two components can proceed in the same manner regardless of whether a course is structured around research article writing or not. Students form small groups based on the topics of their briefing papers and work together to synthesize each other's proposed policy solutions into one coherent policy proposal. In upper-level courses, I ask students to work together in their group to collect quantitative and qualitative data from their community that reinforces the group's policy proposal. The group work step is critical for instructors using this simulation as a standalone assignment because it provides some of the collaborative learning environment that students benefit from during the research article writing process. It also underlines the importance of community engagement in political science and diversifies student perspectives.

Students bring both their individual and group work to class for a legislative policy-making simulation. The exact parameters of the decision-making body can be influenced by the content of the course. As a comparative politics instructor, I tend to ask students to select country (by vote) to use as an example at the beginning of the simulation and to have them adapt their policy proposals to the political and legislative environment in that country during the first few minutes of the simulation. My rules for the simulation are simple: groups have to try to stick to their original policy proposals and some policy must be passed by the legislature before the end of the simulation. Though the mechanics of the simulation can be made more complex if desired, the basic point is that students must work to convince others about the merit of their policy proposal while simultaneously bargaining with other groups who have competing interests. The pre-simulation briefing paper and group assignment are critical for the simulation's success. These components help to make the activity more equitable for those with less public speaking

experience or background knowledge and to ensure that the simulation is grounded in theories and facts, not rhetoric.

Students usually pass some policy proposal during the simulation, and the debrief following the simulation tends to be filled with a combination of excitement about the simulation and recognition of the difficulty of policy making and how often well thought out policy proposals are changed during policy making for the sake of compromise. The energy resulting from this simulation helps me propel my students through the last half of the research article writing process. This pedagogy also encapsulates many of the ideals that political science tries to espouse: careful research, policy relevance, and collaboration with peers. By emphasizing and expanding on each step of the research-based simulation, students can quickly develop many of the skills that are part of the research article writing process.

Conclusion

Exposure to and experience with the components of the political science research article writing process are critical for students' success in senior capstone and research methods courses and are some of the parts of political science that most easily transfer to post-college careers. As an instructor, I initially underestimated my students' ability to successfully work through the entire research article writing process. With the right environment and motivation, students can successfully transition to becoming political scientists.

Students' careers as political scientists may be relatively short --- often relegated to one course in one semester. Yet even small doses of political science training can prove valuable. I recently taught an Introduction to Comparative Politics course with a mix of junior and senior non-majors and younger students who were potential majors. One of the younger students, who had decided on a career as a lawyer, said that he was actually interested in American politics, but took my course just to get some major requirements completed. Although his research project was about voter fraud in Uganda, he told me some time after the course finished that the *process* of writing a research article convinced him that he was interested in pursuing a social science major. He felt that he had a big head start on coursework and research more closely aligned with his interests because he learned how to be a political scientist in that course. Another student, a natural science major, took the same course as her final requirement before graduating and pursuing a career in medicine. She was quite adept at writing research procedures in the natural sciences, but the critical thinking skills and different perspectives in social science research were immediately useful for her as she embarked on her career. Though neither of these students intended on further developing their research articles, both students remarked that the research article writing process was the key defining aspect of the course and provided major benefits for their future careers.

More than any other assignment, I have found that students are empowered when working through the research article writing process. For students, reading published journal articles and having the confidence that they, too, have gone through this process, shifts their perceptions about the discipline, increasing their interest, and improving the classroom climate. Whereas students tend to immediately see the applicability of creating an infographic or slide presentation, teaching the research article writing process requires significant investment from the instructor to explain why the pedagogy is relevant and meaningful. However, once students are able to move past their initial trepidation, the impact of this pedagogy is far-reaching.