

The Demands of Political Science as a Discipline

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While the topic here is not really within the purview of development politics, the Iloilo Committee for this Conference feels that it must be included considering that many of the participants of this Conference are teachers. This paper offers some suggestions on coping with the demands of teaching political science as a relevant discipline.

My paper will not discuss the status of political science as a discipline in the Philippines. Neither will it be so ambitious to discuss how the different areas of study within the discipline are developed or neglected depending on the competence, interest, and dedication of Filipino political scientists. This paper is humbly focused on what should be the role of an ordinary classroom teacher of political science if she or he must contribute to the development of political science as a discipline.

Teaching in general is not merely meeting one's class from hour to hour, then delivering the lecture for the day. Teaching requires a greater responsibility than what appears to be ministerial functions. Above all, the teaching of the discipline must be taken as a very serious matter for the graduate level and especially so for the undergraduates and political science majors.

The reason: from a simple academic study in the classroom, the discipline is expected to develop students who would someday be the professionals to staff important government and private offices within the country and abroad. They would also be the future university professors and scholars, some of whom could become consultants, technocrats or planners of certain public or private entities. They would also be lawyers, public administrators, foreign affairs specialists, diplomats, statesmen, and even strategists. It must not be denied that reformers, critics, and dissenters of the social and political status quo have in some way learned from

political science, which gave them insight and perception of conditions and situations in society.

Realizing such an enormous responsibility, this paper comes up with the recognition of certain demands upon the teacher who is the disseminator or medium of the discipline. At the same time, some recommendations are made on how an ordinary teacher of political science can cope with these demands.

These are:

- a) the need to be an effective teacher;
- b) the need to reconcile teaching and research to enrich the materials for classroom teaching;
- c) the need to publish original researches otherwise perish as a mere classroom teacher;
- d) the need to make the course contemporary and relevant as the part of the social responsibility of a teacher of the discipline.

1. The Need to be an Effective Teacher

For the discipline of political science to be fully appreciated by the students, it is important that the teacher be an effective medium. They say, teaching is both skill and art. Some teachers, however, are less interested in developing either the skill or the art of teaching—thus there are ineffective teachers.

But some political science professors are very successful teachers, not really because they are experts in the art of teaching. For some, it is because of their lengthy stay in the university which have gained them the reputation of being “institutions” in the discipline. Some professors have charisma and some have become idols of the students because of their great ideas. Some professors have the reputation as patient compliers of facts and data and students flock to their classes to benefit from the enormous information that had been systematically compiled by long years of labor. There are of course, the real scholars whose lives are devoted to original researches and students would feel honored to be enrolled in their classes. But these teachers are considered the exceptional few.

This paper also attempts to share certain recommendations based on personal experience, observation, and from views gathered from other teachers as well as the students, on how an ordinary classroom teacher can become an effective medium of the discipline. It is the sentiment of this writer that it is part of the social responsibility of an ordinary teacher of political science to see to it

that she or he becomes an effective classroom teacher of the discipline.

The first rule to follow for an ordinary teacher is to acquire self-confidence in the classroom. This can be facilitated by mastery and thorough knowledge of the scope and content of the subject matter she is going to teach. Students are sometimes affected if the teacher is doubtful about the facts and substance of the course she is teaching. Students too, are quick to sense whether a teacher's arrogance is due to her real nature or to intellectual insecurity and is therefore, a defense mechanism stance.

The second rule is that the teacher must determine ahead what should be the specific goals, purposes, or objectives of the course she is handling. This way, the method of analysis and study as well as the identification of problem areas and important and relevant issues involved in the subject matter would already be geared to the right direction. The teacher must see to it that she can relate the course to the need of contemporary political science.

The third guide would be to adopt a particular approach or convenient method of political analysis in studying the course so that immediately the students would be oriented to the ways and means of coping with the course and the course objectives. A word of caution, however, would be that the teacher must be open-minded, adaptable, and flexible to compromise with any different view that a student may propose. The teacher, however, must not lose track of the fact that she has a duty to teach political analysis even to a beginner student in the simplest, most understandable way without neglecting the basic requirements of conceptualizing in the accepted language of political science.

The fourth rule must be that the teacher must have adequate familiarity with the body of literatures related to the course. This may include also the most current government publications and news reports. The teacher has the duty to provide the students with a course outline or a syllabus to give the students an idea of the coverage of the course and the task on hand. This syllabus she must revise, update, and enrich from time to time to introduce to the students the latest literature on the course which should include all representative views on a particular subject matter. The teacher should also train the students to evaluate and criticize the materials so they would be guided in their search and discovery of the facts and the truth.

The fifth rule is for the teacher to devise a happy compromise

between the rigidity of the course requirements and the students' expectations of a broader class participation, relevance and the satisfaction of their political commitment without sacrificing objectivity and at the same time projecting the original purpose for which the course offering was made.

The sixth rule is for the teacher to make the lecture lively and interesting. One practice that should be avoided is reading the lectures from the lecture notes and dictating them to the students for the duration of class hours on the day to day meetings. The students can only have endurance for this kind of classroom procedure for maybe, the first or two or three meetings. But for this to be done the whole semester is a heavy imposition on the students and is never conducive to learning. This in itself is an example of ineffective teaching. The search for truth in the learning process is not merely exposure to the body of literatures embodying various viewpoints. The main thrust is to develop in the students, curious, questioning, critical, perceptive, and analytical minds. This can be encouraged and nurtured by open and free discussion of many conceptual facets as well as problems and issues involved in the subject matter.

Wherever school one is teaching in, perhaps the most immediate rule and the seventh in this list, is for the teacher to establish a reputation of not being a regular absentee or a late comer. Students may lose interest in coming to class regularly presuming that the teacher would be late beyond fifteen minutes which would give them the liberty to desert the classroom. Students would be afraid to commit more than the allowable absences if the teacher comes to class regularly. Or the students would hesitate to leave the class when the teacher is late beyond the fifteen minutes limit if she is known as one who comes to class on time. In other words, the students would think that the teacher is late or absent not as a matter of habit, but for a justifiable reason.

These seven recommendations are made in the hope they can contribute to effective teaching. Anyone can still improve or go beyond these recommendations.

II. *The Need to Reconcile Teaching and Research to Enrich the Materials for Classroom Teaching*

There are three types of research activities that a political science teacher is expected to engage in. First would be the preparation of original research in a particular area of specialization; second, the preparation of secondary research such as the writing of textbooks

and other instructional materials; and third, the survey and investigation of available materials especially the recent ones in the different fields of political science. Not to be neglected in this third category would be the familiarization with government reports and publications, new legislations, and public pronouncements and policy statements of decision-makers. Even news accounts in newspapers and magazines must be included in this third category.

A handful of political scientists and scholars have achieved successfully the first two categories of research and the third is but a normal exercise for them. Their works are accepted by their peers and are sometimes used as part of the instructional materials by both peers and students. These political scientists and authors are also classroom teachers. It is suggested that as classroom teachers they must take certain factors into consideration: they must be able to impart clearly to the students the subject matters of their research; they must not insist on preaching to their students that their findings and conclusions are the "sole truth" and that no other research contains the "truth" as true as theirs. This will save them what may be a forthcoming heartbreak and disappointment when a critical student comes up with heresies against their *magnum opus*; they must also be tolerant enough to prescribe the works of other authors as readings on a topic closest to their hearts where they have written a great deal. Let not the readings be a monopoly of their own writings.

But let us go back to the responsibility of the ordinary classroom teacher who has not yet obtained the status of the political scientist-author. The ordinary classroom teacher must find time to devote to the third category of research in order to be constantly aware of the new findings, new concepts, and scope of the recent materials in the various fields of political science. She is expected to enrich her classroom teaching. Perhaps also, while in the process of browsing she will find inspiration to conduct an original or secondary research herself.

When a teacher handles a course, be it an old or a new one, it is expected that she must imbibe new substance to develop the course. Therefore, it is not merely for a teacher's academic and professional growth that she must do research work but for the nourishment of the courses that she teaches.

III. *The Need to Publish Original Researches Otherwise Perish as a Mere Classroom Teacher*

The old dictum "publish or perish" has been an accepted rule of the game in the academe. The standard for scholarship is for one to be able to publish her researches and writings. Of course, the criteria for scholarly research in the discipline that deserve publication is not the subject matter of this paper. It can be presumed that it is a secret obsession of any university teacher and those in political science are no exception, to be able to publish a piece of respectable research when an opportunity comes. It must be frustrating for a university professor to have reached the retireable age and finally wither away without having published a book of his authorship.

It must be noted that a handful of recognized political scientists in the Philippines have devoted much effort to certain researches and the publication of their books that it cannot be said that we are very much wanting in the field of political science publications by our own scholars. More are still aspiring to be included in the "magic circle" of political scientists and authors. The funding incentive and opportunity to do research are not limited, according to a very authoritative source from the Philippine Social Science Research Council. It seems implied, therefore, that what is required is merely the initiative of a would-be scholar to directly participate in research activity.

While the idea of initiative and involvement in research may sound simple at this point, the actual task of getting down to work on it may prove tedious for an ordinary classroom teacher who must cope with the need of conducting classes, lessons preparation, the completion of certain pertinent classroom papers such as students' papers and exams, the need to take overload from those privileged to underload as well as the so-called unassigned loads if the department is understaffed. Of course the teacher has to think also of the business of living.

But even if faced with difficulties, the ordinary teacher is compelled to recognize that she must somehow conduct her own research and publish such a work. It is the accepted standard of the profession. One must come to it at a certain point of her career. She has the duty to contribute to the enrichment of the discipline.

Some teachers have engaged in the so-called joint projects or joint-research activities. Some teachers devote more time to research and in the publication of this while they are relieved of their classroom teaching. Some others devote their time to both research

and classroom teaching. Still some others exhaust all the privileges opened for faculty members to go on leave and for underload in order to have more time for research.

Whether the attempt and effort to do research and to publish such would be a success or failure, it must be admitted that the strongest drive behind it is the accepted value that the measure of academic and professional growth in the academe is to publish, or else, perish.

I am not limiting myself to the University of the Philippines. It has to be noted that other named private universities have also set certain standards for research and publication for their faculty members. Also a handful of political science textbooks and instructional materials had been authorized by political science professors from other universities other than the University of the Philippines.

IV. The Need to Make the Course Contemporary and Relevant as Part of the Social Responsibility of the Teacher of the Discipline

The teaching of political science in the last decade seemed to have aroused a persistent clamor for relevance and demand for contemporary focus of the subject matters. It became the preoccupation of a few engaged in the discipline to reexamine the methods of teaching and the course contents of political science courses with the hope to introduce new vigor into them. For the last seven years or so, a few concerned political science teachers in the country attempted to give relevance to the nature of researches and the teaching of political science as a discipline.

For the ordinary classroom teacher, one guideline in making a political science course contemporary is to focus the course content to the present and to the local situation. One difficulty that may have caused irrelevance is the dearth of materials on the Philippines from the Filipino political scientist's point of view. Generally the available materials on political science are those studies done by foreign researchers-authors using alien typologies that may not really find relevance in the study of the Philippine case. It is here where the task of the teacher comes in guiding the students to evaluate the foreign typology when necessary to find meaning in it for the Philippine case, if there is any. It is also here where the teacher's storehouse of knowledge of the nature of other political systems and comparative analysis can be utilized. When one compares, she must know the pertinent variables to compare.

A study of political theories of the ancient Greek philosophers and all the other alien philosophers may be meaningless to the students if taken in the sense that the philosophers have presented their ideas as utopian. The teacher's task is to point out the spirit of reform and the need for social and political changes by which the philosophers conceived of their brilliant theories and recommendations hoping to create an ideal society or an ideal government setup. This way the students will be alerted to watch for useful concepts in a philosopher's recommendation with which they can identify themselves or even fall back on while making recommendations to solve problems in their own socio-political setting. International politics too, as a field of study, must not be conceived as merely a study of how strong and powerful or resources-rich the big powers are and how successful they are in achieving a system of detente. The positions of big powers in the world today must be explained in relation to small countries, the Philippines included. There must be special focus on the power relationship that exists particularly on the basis of who is advantaged or disadvantaged and why. If the study of foreign policies must be included, there must be proper analysis of how big powers implement their foreign policies and how small countries manage to utilize their foreign policies for national interest; and whether they are successful or not in implementing that goal of national interest.

Even the study of Philippine government and politics must be dealt with as truthfully as possible. Truthfulness is not synonymous to fault-finding. Truth is knowing the facts and discussing such in the context that it ought to be discussed. Discussing the Philippine constitutional development and contents of the constitution is not all that Philippine government and politics is. One way to make the study of Philippine government and politics contemporary is to focus on the policies that are the output of the present Philippine political system. The students must learn to evaluate policies to give them the insights on the real need of Philippine society for the present or maybe for the future.

What I have mentioned here are only a few examples of what could be possibilities in making the teaching of the discipline of political science contemporary and relevant. A teacher, if resourceful, will have less problem in making any course she handles contemporary and relevant. All she needs is the determination to be true to the need of the discipline. This, to my mind is her social responsibility.