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Correction

"Maine Documents and Sources," NEWS, Summer 1982 was co-authored by Edward P. Laverty and Kenneth T. Palmer. We regret the omission of Professor Laverty's name.

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Assessing the Impact of a Course on Student Attitudes and Knowledge

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One of the more interesting and under researched questions concerning university teaching deals with the *impact* courses have on students' cognitive knowledge and attitudes. While considerable attention has been devoted to "how to" increase cognitive knowledge, there have not been many attempts to study such changes in regularly taught courses.¹ In similar fashion, there have been a variety of attempts to study attitudinal changes, but these attempts have often been unassociated with specific teaching methodology or course design.² For instance, the political socialization literature has dealt with attitude formation and attitude change in college age youth, but there was little concern for the impact a specific course might have on those attitudes.³ This paper, after defining the various terms and the research setting involved, explores the relationships between cognitive and attitudinal changes by comparing pre and post questionnaire results obtained from students in two different courses.

During the Spring, 1980 semester, we taught a specially designed course titled "Campaign 80".* The course focused specific attention on the nominating and candidate selection processes of the national political parties as well as for a variety of state races in Indiana. The course met three times a week for 50 minutes per session and the students were exposed to considerable information on the institutional and procedural aspects of the nominating process as well as having the opportunity to review and discuss the weekly presidential primary results. Keep in mind that beginning with the New Hampshire primary in late February, the students had regular discussions both before and after each of the presidential primaries. Assigned readings included a specially prepared paperback along with a variety of newspaper and magazine sources.⁴ Several guest speakers, including two gubernatorial candidates spoke to the class. The students in the course were drawn from a variety of schools and classes. (See Table 1, p. 3, for a composite of student characteristics.) The students were given a pre and post questionnaire covering the same material at the start and end of the semester. In addition, a section of introductory American government was selected as a control group. This section did not have a specific focus on the nominating and electoral processes, but rather on the usual institutional and political process materials covered in an introductory American politics course. Table 1 compares the students in the two classes who completed both a pre and post test questionnaire.⁵

Students in both classes had similar family incomes with over 60% of both classes in the \$25,000+ category. Both classes had a diverse student enrollment: the control class drew more heavily from the business and science schools while the Campaign 80 class drew more heavily from the liberal arts and agricultural schools. Party affiliation was similar in both classes with 7% more of the Campaign 80 class (26%) identifying with the Democratic Party and 5% more identifying as Independents (12%). There was a preponderance of males in the control class (74%) while the number of males and females was nearly evenly divided in the Campaign 80 class. The control class had a higher proportion of freshmen and sophomores and more students with a C+ / B-(4.5-5.0) grade point average than the Campaign 80 class.

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Information, Values and Action in the Study of Politics

by Louise K. Comfort
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The Problem: Redefining the Task of Political Education in the 1980's.

Every teacher, walking into a classroom, is confronted with the existential question of "what, specifically, am I to accomplish with this particular group of students, in this particular period of time, within the constraints and possibilities of a university learning context?" Dimly, the awareness grows that this particular 50-minute class every Monday, Wednesday, Friday over the next fifteen weeks may constitute the "political education" for a group of entry-level participants in our democratic political system. What is it that these students need to learn, what skills are most appropriate for them to acquire, what bases for political action, if any, is it possible for them to develop in a university course? These are sobering questions for those of us who are responsible for instruction in politics in the nation's universities. They deserve our thoughtful consideration, especially in the flux of changing economic conditions, technological developments, demographic shifts and their consequent impact upon the distribution of, and demands for, political power.

Definition of the appropriate scope, content and methods of political education has engaged thoughtful minds since Plato. The problem becomes particularly urgent in a democratic society, where the premises of political decision-making are based upon the rational participation of the citizenry and where the measure of success rests, ultimately, upon the degree of equity and justice attained through this process for all members of the national community. The problem is compounded by the increasing

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